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HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

NEW YORK CITY

THE PEOPLE'S THEATER

Translated from the French of

ROMAIN ROLLAND

Author of *Jean-Christophe*, the plays *The Fourteenth of July* and *Danton*, etc., etc.

BY

BARRETT H. CLARK

Translator of Sardou's *Patrie*, *Three Modern Plays from the French*, etc., etc.; author of *British and American Drama of To-day*, etc.

NEW YORK

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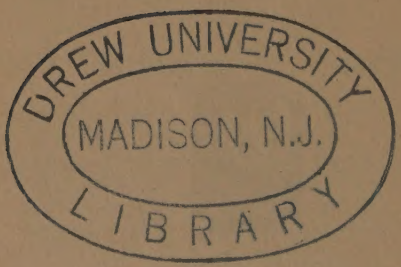

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

BEFORE the manuscript of this translation was sent to press it was forwarded to M. Rolland for his approval. As neither my publisher nor I knew the whereabouts of M. Rolland and as we had merely heard that he had left France not long after the publication of his war pamphlet *Au-dessus de la Mêlée* and was residing in a sort of exile, we were by no means sure that the typoscript or our letters would reach him. But we tried, sending them in care of his Paris publisher.

M. Rolland was finally located, and we began a correspondence from which I shall use certain parts to illustrate this brief preface.

In my original preface to the present volume I had referred to M. Rolland's having retired from public life and being temporarily crushed, but the first letter I received convinced me beyond a doubt that he was far from it. He would never consent to the publication of any translation of his works without first seeing that it rendered faithfully the spirit of the original. He did not care even to discuss terms, and he added, by way of proof of his commercial disinterestedness, that the proceeds of the Nobel Prize, of which he was the recipient not long ago, and which amounted to over $40,000, he had spent in works of charity.

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The manuscripts were therefore sent to him to Villeneuve, in Switzerland. I asked him to look them over, returning only the pages on which he wished to make corrections. A month later I received a letter, from which I quote the most notable passages. It contained one page of the typoscript of *The People's Theater*—from my brief preface.

I ought first to explain that three years ago I spent an afternoon with a friend who had recently visited M. Rolland. He told me at the time that the author of *Au-dessus de la Mêlée* seemed disheartened by the weight of the great war. It was this hint, together with the fact that after diligent search I could find no record of anything new from his pen, that led me to write the paragraph to which our author refers in his letter. Let me quote a short passage from my original preface:

"*The People's Theater* is more than the exposition of a theory; it is autobiography of a sort. Readers and lovers of *Jean-Christophe* will find in this less ambitious work certain hitherto unknown aspects of the soul of the creator of that monumental work. True, this 'work of combat' is youthful, but there is something attractive in the naïve impetuosity with which the young revolutionary sets to work demolishing the idols of the past and attempting to clear the field for a saner, more robust, and healthier drama, and a theater where the workingman and his family may seek relaxation and find food for mind and soul.

"The years have brought maturity to Romain

Rolland and a touch of scepticism; the weight of the great war has for the time being crushed him; but a man who could so bravely combat prejudice, tradition, and hatred as he, need fear nothing from the future."

The letter from M. Rolland, dated Villeneuve, May 15, 1918, reads as follows:

"DEAR MONSIEUR: I received the proofs of your translations, which gave me great pleasure in reading. They seem to offer a faithful rendering of the text. Perhaps certain expressions in *Danton* are occasionally softened [a literal translation would, however, have rendered them harsher to Anglo-Saxon ears than the author intended], but I am not altogether sure about this. I see no important observation to make, and you may therefore proceed with the publication of the plays—*Danton* and *The Fourteenth of July*. . . .

"Regarding the preface to *The People's Theater*, I thank you. However, I seriously object to certain sentences (on page 9). First, when you say 'this *work of combat* is youthful . . . naïve impetuosity . . . the young revolutionary. . . . The years have brought maturity to R. R. and a touch of scepticism'—you seem to think that since I wrote the book I have changed my opinions of the works and the authors whom I criticized. Nothing of the kind. I still would demolish those 'idols' today with the same enthusiasm.

"Second, I unqualifiedly protest against the sentence 'the weight of the great war has for the time

being crushed him.' Crushed! Not in the least, my dear sir. [The original is delightfully apt: *Nullement écrasé, cher monsieur!*] I have never felt so alert and combative as at the present moment. I am merely *gagged!* It is quite impossible now for me to make public my ideas, because they are too liberal. During the past two years of the war I have written an Aristophanic, satirico-poetic comedy on the events of the day, called *L'Ane de Buridan.* I am writing two novels, likewise inspired by present-day events and dealing with characters of the epoch. One is a 'novel of meditation' entitled *L'Un contre tous.* Many Swiss papers have published extracts from it, though it is not yet complete. The other is a novel of young love.

"'Add to these a Rabelaisian novel, the hero of which, a native of Burgundy, like myself, gives his name to the book: *Colas Brugnon.* This is finished, and was even printed in July, 1914; it awaits publication in the office of Ollendorff, my Paris publisher, until the end of the war, for I am loath to have its gaiety made public amid the sorrows of the present time. And, finally, I am writing numerous literary and philosophical articles, as well as essays on current events. These appear in the Swiss magazines—which do not reach America. Whatever the value of these various efforts, you will agree, when you read them, that the war has not in the least depressed me. On the contrary, my ideas differ from those current nowadays, but that

does not bother me. I am only the freer to judge all things, and freedom of soul is dearer to me than happiness itself.

"It is true that today I care much more than I did ten years ago for Voltaire (the Voltaire of the *Contes philosophiques*), and for Erasmus and Montaigne. But not because of their scepticism (you speak of 'a touch of scepticism'); their free and open irony furnishes me with a weapon against prejudice, convention, and the idols of society. I feel that that combat must be fought again today.

"I authorize you to make use of the explanations in this letter, if you deem them interesting or useful.

"Yours, etc.,

"ROMAIN ROLLAND."

A note appended to the page of my preface enclosed in the above letter is well worth quoting, as it throws some light on M. Rolland's present attitude toward war:

"The only play I have written since *The Fourteenth of July* (with the exception of the Aristophanic comedy elsewhere referred to) is *Le Temps viendra.* It is to be reprinted . . . after the war. The problems with which it is concerned [it was laid in South Africa during the Boer war] have once again assumed an air of actuality; and if I have not reprinted it during the past few years . . . it is because I wished to prevent the various 'parties' using as a polemic weapon a work written

ten years before the present war. It was directed (as I state in the preface) not against one particular European nation, but against the whole of European civilization."

M. Rolland has rendered further comment, I think, unnecessary. It is sufficient only to state that *Le Théâtre du peuple* was a polemic against the convention-ridden theater and drama of the day, and a work of inspiration for those who believed that the theater ought to be a place of recreation as well as education—in the broadest sense—for all people, in particular the working classes.

The chapters originally appeared as articles in the *Revue d'art dramatique,* between 1900 and 1903.

Le Théâtre du peuple contains an appendix, quoting many documents of the French Revolution bearing upon the subject of popular festivals. With M. Rolland's permission I have omitted the appendix.

In a very few instances I have taken the liberty of expanding the author's chapter-headings, to guide the reader in search of particular topics.

BARRETT H. CLARK.

Headquarters, Camp Humphreys,
Virginia.
June 22, 1918.

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THE PEOPLE'S THEATER

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

The People and the Theater

A CURIOUS phenomenon has occurred during the past ten years. French art, the most aristocratic of arts, has come to recognize the masses. French artists have, of course, known of the existence of the people before, but they have considered them only as subjects of conversation, as material for novels, plays, or pictures.

"An admirable subject to treat in Latin verses."

But they never took the people into account as a living entity, a public, or a judge.[1] The progress of Socialism has directed the attention of artists to this new sovereign whose politicians up to the present had been its sole spokesmen: authors and actors. And they have discovered the people—discovered, I venture to say, in much the same manner as explorers discover a new market for their wares. The authors wish to import their plays, the State its repertory, actors, and officials. It is a comedy in itself, with a part for each. This is not a fit subject for irony, for no one is quite exempt from its shafts. And we must take men as they are, nor seek to discourage their conscious or unconscious

[1] The poet Rodenbach wrote: "*Art is not for the people.* . . . To make the people understand it, art would have to be brought down to their level."

efforts to combine personal with public gain—provided the latter is assured. But such is the case; and from this movement which progresses so quickly that bad is bound to come hand in hand with good, and personal with public profit, I wish to call attention to but two points: first, the sudden importance assumed by the people in art (or rather, the importance ascribed to the people, for *they* never speak for themselves; everyone assumes the rôle of spokesman for them); and second, the extraordinary diversity of opinion as to the nature of democratic art itself.

In fact, among those who claim to represent the aims of the people's theater, there are two diametrically opposed ideals: the adherents of the first seek to give the people the theater as it now exists, any theater so long as it is a theater; those of the second attempt to extract from this new force, the people, an entirely new theater. The first believe in the Theater, the others in the People. The two have nothing in common: one is the champion of the past, the other of the future.

I need not tell you where the State stands. By its very definition, the State always belongs to the past. No matter how new the forms of life it represents, it arrests and congeals them. But you cannot fix life once for all. It is the function of the State to petrify everything with which it comes into contact, and turn living into bureaucratic ideals.[1]

[1] Since these lines were written, time has confirmed my fears. The interference of the State in projects for popular

This point has been well borne out, occasionally, by the *Œuvre des Trente ans de Théâtre.* Thanks to its intelligent promoter, M. Adrien Bernheim, the classics have been produced in the outlying districts of Paris by actors from the great subventioned theaters. But at once M. Bernheim and his friends declare: "The People's Theater is founded!" Indeed? Re-baptize the bourgeois theater as the People's Theater! That is all! And so nothing has been changed; art alone is to remain stationary amid an ever-changing society; we are forever condemned to adhere to a lifeless ideal, to a theater whose thoughts, style, acting, possess nothing vital, to the degenerate tradition of a house of mummers!

Later on I shall give my opinion of the *Trente ans de Théâtre* enterprise, and try to refer to it with all the respect due to any sincere and generous attempt of that kind. But this attempt assumes a confidence in the essential rightness of our civilization in general and our theater in particular which I for one am far from sharing; and I shall do my best to destroy the illusion. I am well aware that it is shared by the thinking classes of today, but this only proves what we have known for some time: that the thinking classes cannot be depended upon. In vain they strive to change: but they are essentially conservative, they belong to the past, they can produce no new society or art: they will disappear.

Life cannot be linked with death, and the art of

theaters has put an end to them by the introduction of ruinous changes.

the past is more than three-quarters dead. This is true not only of our French art, but of all art. The art of the past does not satisfy us nowadays, and its effects are often detrimental. The first requisite to a normal healthy existence is that art shall continually evolve together with life itself.

I do not know whether the society of today will create its own art, but I am sure that if it fails to do so, we shall have no living art, only a museum, a mausoleum wherein sleep the embalmed mummies of the past. We have been educated to respect the memory of what has been, and we find it exceedingly difficult to tear ourselves loose. The past is wrapped in a haze of poetry, which softens everything to the indistinctly melting outlines of a distant view. But from these beautiful forms which once throbbed with vitality, the life has faded, or is fading from day to day. And if even a few masterpieces, more robust than the rest, still wield some of their pristine power over us, I am not sure that that power is beneficial nowadays. Nothing is good except in its place and time. You may believe that the good and the beautiful are absolute unchanging entities; but modes of expression vary according to each human mind; and the forms which were charming and noble in one century are more than likely, when carried over into another, to appear monstrous anachronisms. One of the dangers of art pointed out by Tolstoy arises perhaps from the fact that the forces of another day, when brought into an epoch where they do not belong, occasion serious

disorders. It is not only in the domain of ethics that "a meridian decides the truth" and "a river fixes the boundary"; it is the same in art. Certain ages proscribed all representation of the nude, not only on moral but esthetic grounds. The sculptors of the Middle Age shunned the naked body as a thing deformed, believing that "clothing was necessary to bodily grace." The painters of the School of Giotto found "no perfect proportion" [1] in the female body. The men of the seventeenth century who knew most about Gothic architecture,[2] condemned it for the identical reasons which render it most beautiful in our eyes. A genius of the eighteenth century [3] considered it an insult to be compared with Shakespeare. A great Italian painter [4] spoke of Flemish art in derision, saying that it was "good for women, priests, and other pious people." Tolstoy's Moujik is disgusted with the Venus of Milo. It is possible that what is beautiful to the cultured few may seem ugly to the people, and that it fails to satisfy their needs, which are as legitimate as our own. Let us not blindly seek to impose upon the people of the twentieth century the art and thought of the aristocratic society of the past. And besides, the People's Theater has more important work to do than to collect the fragments of the bourgeois theater. It is not our intention to increase the audiences of the established theaters; we are not working for them: we have only

[1] Cennino Cennini, in 1437.
[2] Fénelon.
[3] Gluck.
[4] Michelangelo.

to think of the welfare of art and of the people. One needs be a great optimist to believe that the general diffusion of artistic culture, taken as a whole, has anything to do with our plans.

Let us be brave enough to combat the proud superstitions clinging to that precious art of ours in which we take so much pride. Let us now see whether in all the dramatic impedimenta of the past there is anything for the people. And if we find nothing, let us be frank enough to confess it, without fear or prejudice.

PART I

THE THEATER OF THE PAST

CHAPTER I

MOLIÈRE

I BEGIN by agreeing that we have the elements of a popular comic drama; of this Molière is the keystone. In some ways he apparently belongs more to the people than to the bourgeosie. The ideas of our class are not always in perfect accord with Molière's. If we were frank, we should sometimes confess to a feeling of revulsion, antipathy, which we none the less restrain for fear of making ourselves ridiculous by criticizing a classic. Our animal spirits have so decreased that we take little pleasure in the rough-and-tumble exploits of a Scapin or a Sbrigani, beatings and clysters, vulgar exhibitions, and above all in the brutal harshness of the often cruel vigor that is directed against weak and strong alike, sparing neither age nor infirmity, nor anything deserving of pity. The Great King roared with laughter when Lully, clad in mufti, jumped out over the end of the stage, and smashed a clavecin to bits with his feet and fists. Saint-Simon tells of the monstrous and inhuman tricks played by the attendants of the Duchess of Burgundy at Versailles, incidents revealing the savagery of the Court. Molière's actors were true interpreters of the spirit of the time. Today the people no longer enjoy

these things. But we must be careful to distinguish the peoples of various nations, if I may believe what was told me of a popular production of *Georges Dandin* in Russia. The play aroused the ire of the peasants, who sympathized with Dandin and were indignant at the tricks played upon him by his wife. We are not quite so bad as that; for *Le Mariage forcé* is one of the greatest successes at our People's Universities. At Gérardmer I saw a performance of *Le Médecin malgré lui* under the direction of Maurice Pottecher; and though the actors were only the young inexperienced boys and girls of the village, the play seemed more appropriate than as if it were on the boards of the Théâtre-Français. The experiments with *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* and *Le Malade imaginaire,* under the auspices of the *Coopération des idées* and in the outlying theaters, were no less successful. These works seem to be of the people, by reason of their broadness, their robust light-heartedness, and their Rabelaisian spirit. But let us not hasten to conclude that this is all that is required. I once saw a production of *Le Malade imaginaire,* offered by the *Trente ans de Théâtre;* it was successful—though the sentimental declamations of Musset the same evening were received with more applause. Never before had I realized the monstrousness of the play, not only because certain actors saw fit to exaggerate their already exaggerated sense of comedy, but because when the play was exposed to the

light, I could see at once that part of the classic convention which is hidden beneath the buffoonery of genius. At the Comédie-Française we are used to this, and do not notice it; but the people are not, and they are surprised. More than once have I observed that my neighbors, as at the People's Universities, were ill at ease at these plays, and saw the suspicion creep upon them that their bourgeois amusers were treating them like children in their endeavor to reach the level of that particular public. And this feeling spoiled all the pleasure—a real pleasure, of course, for who can resist the laughter of Molière?

If the people were to get nothing from Molière but the low comedy, he would not be worth while: they might perhaps profit by the language, but would remain untouched and unenlightened. I fear such is the case nowadays: the classical masterpieces of Molière leave them unmoved; I have seen them sit, politely bored, through a performance of *Le Misanthrope*—an admirable piece of salon psychology —or *Les Femmes savantes,* wherein comedy borrows some of the dignity and nobility of tragedy. I am aware that the production of *Tartuffe* at *Bata-clan* in November, 1902, was a tremendous success; it was not, however, due to Molière, but to M. Combes, or his mouthpiece—the anti-clerical journalist who took it into his head to draw a parallel between the mishaps of Orgon, and the Congregations affair, and "in the person of Tar-

tuffe denounced the eternal enemy, declaring that the struggle ought to continue, and that it was more necessary at present than ever before." As one critic naïvely expressed it: "The man in black is an object of horror to the French public. We never tire of denouncing and hating him." [1] Such considerations are, of course, foreign to art, and I have cause for believing that if *Tartuffe* had been left to stand or fall on its own merits, it would have proved much less successful. In spite of its savor and its vigorous power, the form of the play is not sufficiently free; it smacks of its century; long speeches abound, and a vast amount of topical religious discussion, which is quite lost on the people. They despise religious hypocrisy, of course, but I doubt whether they understand it, especially under the disguise it assumed in the days of *Les Provinciales*.

But let us not quibble over the worth of Molière: he has contributed generously. From one or the other aspects of his comic genius he has succeeded in pleasing all classes for two centuries, and he often resembles them by reason of his fraternal joyousness. This is a rare phenomenon, practically unique on our stage. Molière's style is not rare in France, but no matter how great the talent of the successors of that great man, not one of them possessed his opulent mixture of opposed temperaments; he had two natures, as it were, one that analyzed life with ironic finesse, another that reveled gaily in it. Ob-

[1] In *Le Temps*, Nov. 24, 1902.

servation on the one hand, and vigor on the other. After him, and according to which of the two sides of Molière they relished, the public was divided, and art degenerated. Later I shall take occasion to say what I think of our modern comedy.

CHAPTER II

CLASSIC TRAGEDY

THE comedy of Molière can, if need be, satisfy the first needs of a People's Theater, but not for long. Speaking generally, he does not offer enough comedy. Laughter is a force, and intelligent satire of the vices satisfies the reason. But we cannot find in Molière the necessary springs to action. Classic comedy, especially, is cast into an extremely rigid form; its domain is that of common-sense, which reigns supreme. Beyond this it does not extend. Now, there is nothing so precious as common-sense; at a time when there seems to be so little, it would be unwise to assert the contrary; common-sense may lead us anywhere, even to heroism—we have proofs of that. But the people are like a woman: they are not actuated by reason alone, but rather by instinct and passion, and these must be nourished and directed. The emotions aroused by great tragic art are capable of producing deep and lasting effect. Have we in France a tragic repertory which can serve this purpose? Have we tragic plays which exalt the heroic powers of the soul, the vigor of the passions and the will?

The first that come to our attention are the classic tragedies of the seventeenth century.

A great to-do has been made over the success of certain productions; for example, *Andromaque* at *Ba-ta-clan.* This is what led M. Bernheim and his friends to declare that classic tragedy was a popular form. Let us inquire a little more closely.

"The experiment tried out at *Ba-ta-clan,*" writes M. Larroumet, a champion of M. Bernheim, "was a brilliant success. *Andromaque* aroused unheard-of enthusiasm. The three thousand spectators lost not a single detail of the action, not a word of the dialogue. They caught and appreciated the elegance of Racine, his choice of words, his use of general terms, his delicate shades—everything." [1]

For my part I cannot imagine an "audience of three thousand" proletarians appreciating the "choice of words" and the "delicate shades" of Racine, like so many professors of rhetoric. He who wishes to prove too much, proves nothing. Again let us look into the matter and see under what conditions the play was produced. This time the play was not presented to the public by an anti-clerical journalist, but a counsel of the assizes. Why a counsel? The critic of *Le Temps* tells us:

"Maître Félix Decori, the celebrated counsel, ought by reason of his position to be able to obtain a clear view of the art of Racine. There is not a theme in Racine's plays which does not appear on some page of the *Gazette des Tribunaux.* And the theme of *Andromaque* in particular is no other than a crime of passion. The adventure of Orestes and

[1] In *Le Temps,* Oct. 27, 1902.

of Pyrrhus, of Hermione and Andromache, is simply this: a woman takes revenge on a man who refuses to love her, but is in love with another woman. She incites the man who loves her to kill the first. She, however, does not love the murderer, though she has promised to marry him. Maître Decori has only to recall some similar incident from his past experience, in which he will find a butcher and his wife, their assistant and a shop-girl. In fact, this is what Maître Decori actually did; and he concluded with these words: 'I have just told you the story of *Andromaque.*'"

Now I understand the success of *Andromaque.* But here you have merely given the people a story from the *Petit Journal!* Do you really think that is the subject of *Andromaque?* Is that the "delicate shades," the "elegance of Racine"? How could you have possibly failed to observe that in the art of Racine the subject is next to nothing, that the analysis of human souls, and the style, is everything? Do you not see that when you emphasize the melodramatic element, you are not increasing appreciation of Racine; you are merely making him ridiculous?

M. Faguet felt this, and in one of his most open-minded articles set forth with striking irony what the people saw in Racine's masterpieces. M. Faguet is certainly no friend of the popular theater movement and he has often shown his disapproval to readers of the *Journal des Débats*—who asked nothing better than to be convinced. He said that "the

people's theater cannot exist, *because* up to the present it never has existed," [1] thus admitting in advance there is no progress, and that nothing ever changes. Which is at least convenient. But M. Faguet is much too clever for me to attempt to disprove an assertion the truth of which he is better able to see than anyone else; the only revenge I wish to take is to borrow a little of his irony—especially when it suits my purpose.

" So you have taken it into your heads to consider *Andromaque* a melodrama? " he asks. " If so, you have seen that it can very well be so considered. We find an innocent woman being persecuted, and a ferocious tyrant. Here are the ingredients of melodrama, all the ingredients. And after many peripeties, in which the sympathetic character never once flinches, she is just about to commit a crime—but does not, remaining faithful to these two sentiments: maternal love and conjugal love. The ferocious tyrant is killed, the traitress stabs herself, the traitor goes mad, and the sympathetic character becomes Queen, and lives secure with her little boy who has been saved from drowning. This is pure melodrama, the king of melodramas."

Then comes a *dénouement* à la Diderot, introduced for the popular productions: the coronation of Andromache. " She mounts to the throne, Céphise brings her her son, whom Andromache takes on her knees and embraces. Curtain."

" But," continues M. Faguet, " see how many of

[1] *Journal des Débats,* July 20, 1903.

our classic tragedies contain the necessary elements of melodrama, with the sympathetic character in danger, the sympathetic character triumphing in the end, virtue rewarded and vice punished. I have seen *Phèdre* and *Athalie* produced before popular audiences, and received respectfully and coldly. In *Phèdre* the audience cared only for the innocent victim, Hippolytus. They were not truly aroused until the discussion scene between Hippolytus and Theseus, in the fourth act, and Théramène's speech. *Athalie* was another matter. The only effect produced was of wonder. The popular audience was astonished, and again astonished, straight up to the end. Quite natural. What did the popular public do? What would you have them do? They looked for the sympathetic character, and found it not, as Racine has neglected or scorned to introduce one. They said to themselves: 'I see: Joad is an old rascal, but clever; Athalie is an old harradan; Abner is a fool pure and simple. But with whom may I sympathize? When is he coming on? I am waiting for him to stir me!' And the popular public waited for him to the end of the last act; they cared not a jot about Athalie's murder, Joad's triumph, or Joas' coronation. *And neither did I,* because I had become one of the people, and I gradually concluded: 'This play is admirable, but *admirable* and *interesting* are two different things; as regards dramatic interest, *the people are right; it is not an interesting play!*'"

I call your attention to these last lines, so lucid

and so frank. And they are true not only of *Athalie,* but of the great majority of our classic masterpieces. The fact that Racine is not popular proves nothing against the people, nor against Racine. They belong to two different worlds, and there is no reason for bringing them together. The great art of Racine is serenely impersonal; at the base of it, seen as through limpid water, appear human souls and emotions—especially weak souls and feminine emotions. The author does not take sides; he seems scarcely to care about the events which are to ruin his heroes; he does nothing for them; he merely allows them passive submission in the face of a superior and dominating power. He is not The Master whose thought the crowd, especially the French crowd, loves to feel dominating them; nor does his gospel particularly move them. The plays of Racine are the work of a dilettante of genius, a disciple of art for art's sake, who is in no wise interested in action, and who in consequence can exert no influence—unless it be upon artists like himself, the aristocracy, which are always limited.

With Corneille it is different. Here we are in the presence of a power addressing itself directly to the will, a man speaking to men, with a great sweep of action which continuously binds the public to what transpires on the stage. Certain delicate souls may perhaps be shocked at the insistence shown by the man who talks straight into your face, and who will not stop until he has seized, held,

and wearied you with his endless chatter. But the people like to be led. Never do they seem ill at ease at a play of Corneille's; never, as at a tragedy of Racine's, do they remain strangers to what is happening on the stage, and merely witness the exterior of interior dramas. Corneille throws them at once into the midst of the action. He realizes that the first law for a great dramatist is to speak for everyone. The robust Norman belonged temperamentally in more ways than one to the people: his love of talk, his sanguinary violence, his sudden transports of anger, his brusque reversals of feeling, his instinctive savagery so thinly veiled behind the expression of general ideas—Horatius, for instance, stabbing his sister in the name of reason.[1] His full-length characters, the victims of sudden occurrences transforming them from top to toe, are essentially proletarian. The complete change that takes place in the souls of Cinna, Emilia, Augustus, is almost inexplicable to the bourgeois mind, which is slow and reflective; but quite natural to passionate unsophisticated souls.[2]

And yet not one play of Corneille is altogether

[1] " C'est trop, ma patience *à la raison fait* place. (*Horatius kills Camilla.*) "

[2] Certain passages in Corneille show a succession of passions as rapid and unexpected as the mimicry of a semi-barbarous Japanese actor:

" Ma haine va mourir, que jai crue immortelle;
Elle est morte, et ce cœur devient sujet fidelle;
En prenant désormais cette haine en horreur,
L'ardeur de vous servir succède à sa fureur."

(*Cinna.*)

adapted to the needs of the people. For several reasons:

The language. It is a fact that the form of a tragedy or a *drame* "dates" more quickly than that of a comedy; at least, it sooner ceases to be understood by the public. It is not so realistic, and depends less upon the observation of human nature; it is more subjective, more personal; it bears the imprint of the epoch and the nation more unmistakably. The poet's imagination receives its nourishment from the atmosphere of the century, from the esthetic conventions with which he has been surrounded. Nothing goes out of fashion more readily than a poetic metaphor—when the poet has lived in court life or in salons, the intellectual baggage of which changes completely every ten or twenty years. And so his images often become unintelligible except to the cultured few, who find a charm in the unusual and surprising—be they of the strange burning variety of Shakespeare, or delicate and out-of-date, as with our classic writers. Besides, Corneille's style is particularly obscure. Except at the culminating points in the action, it is abstract, involved, incorrect, and occasionally enigmatic; even in his day people spoke of the Cornelian jargon. This is not always, however, an unsurmountable obstacle to popular appreciation, since the people listen only for the thundering passages, and it is the general impression which affects them. But this ought to be realized as a matter for regret, this stupid fascination of mere words, disarming reason; it has

caused innumerable tragedies in history; and the function of the People's Theater, far from encouraging sluggishness of mind, is to combat it unceasingly, in presenting to the people only what they are able to understand.

And besides, Corneille's whole dramatic system is antagonistic to the popular audience. He offers them a minimum of pleasure. There are few characters, few events, and no scenic trappings: a plot developed through abstract speeches. His plays are based upon the old Humanities, Latin discourses, legal discussions, and bourgeois rhetoric. There is nothing to attract the living people who suffer because of their cramped position. There is nothing for their avid and childlike imagination. One feels that Corneille's art is the expression of a society "of dry imagination and rigid reason," [1] which is absolutely opposed to the people. This is strikingly demonstrated in the ideas, the subjects, even the characters, many of whom seem foreign and utterly strange. I do not necessarily mean the mad fury of certain characters, the sharp edge of which is now dulled; or the stone-age passions—the "point of honor," for instance (more striking still in the Spanish plays, leading the heroes of Calderon to the commission of absurdly atrocious crimes). Nor do I refer to those dead parts of the soul revealed by the poet, the insufferable gallantry and cold politeness of love-making now so hopelessly outmoded. The very essence of Corneille's art is

[1] Gustave Lanson.

practically dead for us of today. It was a political art, intended for statesmen, patriots, and those interested in the theory of government and revolution. As has been said, it reflects the generation of great ambitious men, laid low, not without difficulty by Mazarin and Richelieu, whose dominant passion was government, and who in thought and sometimes in action, after trying all forms of politics and contemplating all things, contributed to the elaboration of the powerful machine of the State in the seventeenth century. It was for them that the discussions in *Cinna, Sertorius,* and *Othon* were written. No matter how clear-sighted and penetrating these discourses were, what possible interest do they offer us of today? Undoubtedly, our own age, like Corneille's, is a political one, and we have resolutely set ourselves to solve our problems of government and society, to find a new formula which shall satisfy our moral and intellectual needs. But our present-day problems are not the problems of two centuries ago, and as for politics, we are interested in nothing that does not immediately concern us. The reasoning of Cinna and Maximus is as valid as it ever was, but (as is almost always the case with Corneille) it is an aristocratic sort of reasoning, a thing apart from practical affairs, and consequently disdained by the people. And they are right. These discussions and reasonings lead almost invariably to the apotheosis of monarchy, and a victorious peace after long wars. We can easily understand why Napoleon used *Cinna* to

further his ends, when he had Talma play it at Erfurt before the vanquished kings. Nowadays such plays ring false. As for forcing the people to accept them as art, and not taking into account the ideas set forth in them—well, it is a very dangerous sort of dilettantism.

But there are some few of Corneille's plays that may perhaps be acceptable to the people. There is *Horace,* in which the sturdy heroism of the principal character is well calculated—maybe too well—to stir the people. Even the trial at the end is not without a certain grandeur, which appeals rather to the people than to the ordinary public. Unfortunately, the language is too often obscure and the action slow and uninteresting. The ardent spirit of youth in *Le Cid,* its freedom of form, its abounding vitality, arouse irresistible enthusiasm. And yet I am not sure whether the particular problem of chivalry which the dueling gentlemen of the court of Louis XIII are called upon to solve has not become a trifle archaic for the workingmen of the Faubourg-Saint-Antoine. Possibly *Nicomède* is the play best suited to the people, for the hero belongs to a class dear to their hearts: a good and joyous giant, a Gallic Siegfried, alone among his enemies, frustrating their plots, poking fun at their weaknesses, and all with an air of ironic bravura—and finally triumphant. The figures about him are altogether picturesque: the beautiful savage Laodice, the old king, a liar and a coward, the French knight Attale and the Anglo-Saxon diplomat Fla-

minius. The play is ingeniously constructed and the action more interesting than most tragedies—at least, the interest is sustained by more surprises, and rises steadily up to the end. Why is the style more obscure than ever and more replete with jargon? Like *Horace, Nicomède* could not be produced without cuts and many explanations. Finally—and we need proceed no further in our inquiry—we may say that unless we alter them beyond recognition, we have no use for our seventeenth century tragedies on the stage, and must relegate them to the library.[1]

[1] Maurice Pottecher, who is in a position to observe the popular public, is of the same opinion: "I do not think it possible to use our classical tragedies; they belong to an aristocratic form of art which seems out of place in a people's theater. Popular actors are not intended to speak the language of Corneille and Racine." (*Le Théâtre du Peuple,* in the *Revue des Deux Mondes,* July 1, 1903.)

CHAPTER III

THE ROMANTIC DRAMA

THE case is far different with the Romantic Drama. Our problem is not so much to render it accessible to the people, as to keep it from them if, as it seemed, they showed signs of liking it too well. I need not repeat that the Romantic Drama is a kind of melodrama; and all the purely verbal poetry with which it is garnished can only increase its perniciousness.[1] It is merely a lion's skin thrown over a bit of trifling nonsense. With all its superb intentions to supply the key to the universal enigma, depict and expound the whole world, "to observe everything at one time and in its every aspect"—as the poet naïvely proclaims in the preface to *Marie Tudor*—this form of drama requires very little ability in the writing. So far as observation is concerned, it relies on abstractions, as in the tragedies of Voltaire, wherein the author seeks to overwhelm one with a wealth of detail as meticulous as it is questionable. So far as thought is concerned, it is a motley harlequin of contradictory whims, in which

[1] It goes without saying that I do not here refer to the admirable aristocratic reveries of Musset, nor to the few cold and anti-popular plays of Aldred de Vigny—which, by the way, are vastly inferior to their reputation.

the dominant note is an ordinary Naturalism—derived from the Encyclopedists—over which the Revolutionary stress and exasperated violence of German Romanticism have spread a thin veneer. Reeking with violence, bombast, bravura, striking metaphor, false science, and false thought, this type of drama is the swaggering bully of French art. The dramatists do not take the trouble to think, learn, or observe; their plays possess neither truth nor sincerity: they are masterly "bluffs." They are simply melodrama, exploiting the public, who swallow them out of sheer ignorance, deceived by the brilliancy of the style and the rank sentiment; for the people are easily moved without asking the reason why, and what is evil in them seeks out from under the pseudo-humanitarian and pseudo-religious varnish the bait of a gross materialism, and bites at it. The false brigands and false revolutionaries of this form are the first-born and most comely offspring of that Montmartre art which has since then so deeply influenced French thought. It is an art of literary coteries, abounding in talent, but scarcely ever reaching maturity, because it lacks restraint, sincerity, and self-criticism. All this Romantic upheaval smacks more of Bohemia than of the Revolution. In deafening the people with anarchistic declamations, these plays contribute more effectively toward keeping them in their present state of inertia than even the licensed purveyors of the Bourgeoisie. The poetic barrenness of the elder Dumas proves the essential emptiness of the melodrama type, stripped

of lyricism, and standing naked before the world. I firmly believe that the Romantic Drama is a hindrance to the People's Theater we are seeking to establish in France. It has sent forth innumerable offshoots, which may be divided into two main branches: the dramas in Hugo's style, and those in the elder Dumas'. These latter, crude melodramas pure and simple, with their beggars in silks and satins, and braggart adventurers, have descended upon our outlying theaters like a swarm of locusts and stripped everything bare in their wake. The former, less bumptious as it were, aiming at something higher, have assumed a place in the so-called poetic drama repertory, where they have done their best to corrupt the taste of the Bourgeoisie—and succeeded. But it was an easy conquest. The bourgeois public is capable of judging only a work of average realism, with a basis of common-sense and a moderate dose of observation. It is beyond its depth in poetry, and cannot distinguish the false from the true. Caricature will probably be more acceptable to them, because it is more obvious. Through snobbishness they were forced to pretend to understand a language that was strange to them, and they went straight to the charlatans, and were deceived. The critics, who ought to have shielded them, abdicated to a man, for fear of making a stand against the current fashion, from indifference, from dilettantism, or from a lack of faith in ordinary common-sense; and absurdity ran riot on the stage, where it did not lack its illustrious inter-

preters. It may safely be asserted that at least one of these interpreters played a decisive part not only in the success but in the evolution of the form: the name of Sarah Bernhardt will best characterize this Byzantinized—or Americanized—Neo-Romanticism, rigid, fixed, and without youth; lacking vigor, and surcharged with both genuine and artificial ornament—and withal sad under all its gorgeousness, and tawdry in its color.

Of late, M. Rostand has deliberately revived the Romanticism of Hugo and the elder Dumas, and infused a semblance of new life into it with his southern *brio,* seasoning it with a little fashionable slang. But this brilliant and acrobatic poet, this gamin of Romanticism, is no more than a comic dramatist masquerading in the cloak of the tragedian. The author of Prince Long-Nose, escorted by his d'Artagnans, the clown Flambeau, called Flambard, the impossible Metternich—a Punch-and-Judy policeman—with all his amusing speeches, his nimble wit, his puns and poetic gasconades, has not yet touched true tragic sentiment except to prove that it is a closed book to him. Instead, he has eloquently flattered the public with the crude jingoism of *L'Aiglon* and the demi-mondaine piety of *La Samaritaine.* He has succeeded; and to some people success is the sole criterion. I am sure he can do better work, but he must beware. Success and fortune have estranged him from life, which he neither sees nor hears. His province is the rhetoric of life. I am sorry to have to criticize him, for he is a dis-

tinct power, and every power, be it of words, of metaphor, or of gaiety, is worthy of sympathy—and I am in sympathy with M. Rostand. But if he fails to put himself at the service of truth, we shall be constrained to combat him as a public menace. (It is not given to everyone to be a public menace!) How many poets there are who think they have served their country because they sang of heroism, devotion, and sacrifice! But if their faith has been only of the lips and not of the heart, if they have cared only for verbal felicity and not for serious and stubborn realities, if they have sought personal success and not the welfare of others, then they have rendered heroism, devotion, and sacrifice objects of contempt, and in no wise served their cause. The virtuosos of sentiment, who listen only to their own songs and sing for public applause, are vicious, because they habituate others to self-deception.

It is now a fashion—first introduced, I think, by M. Jules Lemaître—to urge that snobbishness should be encouraged by the public, as the ally of new ideas, bringing, as it does, money and public favor. Possibly this shameful practice is not unwarranted under actual conditions, but we shall have nothing to do with it in our People's Theater. A nation might conceivably do without beauty; but it ought not, it cannot dispense with truth. We do not ask them to respect and admire what they do not understand: that is all very well if you wish to form a nation of petty officials under a despotic leadership. We ask them not to accept anything they cannot

understand, nor admire what they cannot feel. What odds if this is at first unfair to certain works of art? The people actually come nearer to a true appreciation of them in not accepting than do the snobs in applauding them; and, besides, they preserve intact their source of truth, whence springs all greatness of soul. At any rate, I should feel no anxiety for such a people. Well endowed, like our own, and sincere—if they are but relieved of the excessive burden of labor under which they now struggle, and given a chance to think—there is nothing to which they cannot attain. But false feeling and false thinking engendered by most of our present-day poetry would otherwise contaminate them with an ineradicable taint.

CHAPTER IV

THE BOURGEOIS DRAMA

Our century has witnessed the development of still another type of play, one that has been immensely successful: the Bourgeois Drama. An outgrowth of the Tearful Comedy of the eighteenth century, it kept pace with a profound social evolution: the rise of a certain class to a position of great power. It owes what I must confess—putting aside my personal feelings—to be its legitimate success to the fact that it interpreted the spirit, the problems, and preoccupations of the class in question. There is nothing more just than that art should interpret the life of the time. Unfortunately, the Bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century, different from that of the sixteenth and seventeenth, takes less interest in practical than in abstract questions, especially in the matter of art. We are made uncomfortable in witnessing this in the theatrical productions which reflect it. Augier and Dumas fils, the spokesmen of the Bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century, did not depict characters—as Molière did; or conditions—as Diderot tried to do; or to write personal and intimate tragedies and domestic dramas—or when they tried, they were not successful. They are interested primarily in certain

domestic and social problems, which are merely stated, and not solved. It is only natural that such works should have impressed the audiences of the day, and no less natural that they should pass away with their time, if they are good as thesis-plays and not as transcriptions of life: for a social reform can render the thesis devoid of interest. This sort of play may be useful to society, perhaps even to the public, because it forces them to think, but it is a form which constantly requires new material, suited to ever-changing conditions. Since it is the mirror of a society subject to unending evolution, since it is the auxiliary and counsellor of lawyers and law-makers, since it treats the sores caused by the vices flourishing under the present organization, and since cleansing brings relief, practically all the subjects about which thesis-plays can be written go out of date every twenty or thirty years. Very few of them are based upon eternal truths, and if one or two such there be, I have perceived no touch of the genius in them that makes for immortality. The thesis-play is essentially a work of transition; what constitutes its power today is its weakness tomorrow; and if our People's Theater were to throw open its doors to it, we should require an entirely new repertory; for what do the people care about bourgeois problems, limited as they are to the Bourgeoisie? If we would perpetuate the type, we must keep it abreast of the times by adapting it to the most recent developments.

If the poetic drama is wanting in common-sense

and truth, the bourgeois drama is wanting in poetry. It is too limited, too prosaic; it offers to a nation in a difficult and dangerous situation, requiring the very greatest development of her powers, no better nourishment than comedy. Of late years, a few splendid attempts have been made in France—not to mention other countries—to open the doors of the bourgeois theater to poetry and to the people, but although we can observe in them a more sympathetic treatment of the soul and the problems of the people, they are stigmatized for the most part by the touch of what is most unpopular and aristocratic. *Le Repas du Lion* of M. François de Curel is the most striking example.

I have little to say of our modern comedies. They show considerable talent, but on the whole they are thin and insipid, sentimental and corrupt. They reflect their public, a lazy and degenerate Bourgeoisie, without energy to love, hate, judge, or really desire anything. They drift uncertainly between flirtations and pornography, and occasionally include both in a disgusting and puerile combination. These plays have never truly represented the nation: they insult her. I remember the disdain and indignation I felt when I first came to Paris and discovered the art of the boulevards. I am no longer indignant, but my disdain has remained. These plays dishonor us because of their very fame. The theaters where they are produced are the vile pleasure-houses of Europe. Let them continue to pollute their cosmopolitan audiences, if they so wish—

the snobs can defend themselves, and if they want the mud, let them grovel, there is no harm done. I am tempted to say to the actors what Timon said to Phryne and Timandra: "Continue to be what you are . . . and ruin those who wish to be ruined." But you must not contaminate the people. Do not attempt to pollute their sources of truth and life.

But I feel that in a theater which is open to all, where men, women, and children shall gather as one family, the public will be their own censor and command respect where respect is due. The instinct of self-preservation is too powerful for it to be otherwise: a healthy people will not allow itself to degenerate out of sheer light-heartedness, as if they were no longer of any use in the world.

CHAPTER V

FOREIGN PLAYS

Greek Drama

Shakespeare, Schiller, Wagner

There remain the plays of the other nations. Great dramatists, the greatest in the history of the theater—Sophocles, Shakespeare, Lope, Calderon, and Schiller—have all been dramatists of the people in their day—at least in some of their plays. But differences of time and of race are most unfortunate. In spite of the compelling charm and melancholy majesty a play of Sophocles with its serene perfection of Greek art will always possess for a cultured few, and in spite of the intolerance of the admirers of what I may call the recent success of *Œdipus the King,* that success is for the most part due to erudition, superstitious respect and, above all, the prestige of an actor of genius. Without the name of Sophocles, and the poignant though almost wholly plastic emotion of Mounet-Sully's acting and the considerable impression produced by the mediocre music, neither the people nor the Bourgeoisie could have distinguished the sublime greatness of *Œdipus the King* from a host of melodramas of a bygone day.

And in spite of the great distance separating us from the moral and religious beliefs of the Greeks, we are nearer to the spirit of Sophocles than—I shall not say Lope and Calderon, whose bloody dramas, rapacious heroes and gentlemen-assassins will never be acceptable to us until the re-establishment of bull-fighting and gladiatorial combats (a possibility, indeed, but not one we particularly care to envisage)—to Shakespeare. Indeed, everything separates him from us, time as well as nationality. Nothing more surely proves our narrowness of mind, its inability without proper preparation to identify ourselves with a past epoch. The style, which in its own day was a transparent evil, exactly suited to the thought, actually obscures it nowadays, like an opaque and many-colored curtain, the strange design and color of which confuse and blind us. I once attended a popular reading of *Macbeth* by Maurice Bouchor. I tried to forget myself and become one of the people; but I felt ill at ease, and almost ashamed when I heard certain metaphors, the archaic grandeur of which, *under the circumstances,* assumed an obscure and impossibly absurd importance. Ought we then to divest Shakespeare of the charming and barbaric beauty of his style? That were a sacrilegious and perilous task, exceedingly difficult for those who love him. And it would not, besides, preserve the integrity of the rest. It would be necessary to cut, slash, and modify, both characters and plot, in order to make the plays suitable to our public. The English themselves

have felt free to do this, and also the Germans, with all their boasts about exactitude, and their famous translations, "almost as good as the original"—what volumes this phrase tells of their appreciation! And we in France have all the more reason to accept such profanation, though without doubt the popular audiences in this country come nearer to appreciating certain sides of Shakespeare's work than the ordinary audience. They understand what is instinctive and violent in it; but still, how immeasurably far from his myriad-minded genius do they still remain! It is a pitiful thing to have to bring the works of a great man down to the level of the masses!

We should also be forced to mutilate the plays of the great poetic dramatists of the beginning of the nineteenth century. Among the popular dramas of that time, I should beyond all question put the *Wilhelm Tell* of Schiller, and the *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg* of Heinrich von Kleist, the most powerful of German tragic writers. Kleist's work is passionate and grandiose; even nowadays it arouses great enthusiasm among German audiences, but it is the very apotheosis of the Prussian monarchical ideal, and we might be somewhat embarrassed to further that. But the play is valuable to us because it is an almost unique type of the patriotic drama, in the best sense of the term, without jingoism, and without the usual flattery of the base instincts of the multitude. As for the admirable *Wilhelm Tell,* vibrating with thick red blood and

interpreting the honest genius of the heroic Bourgeoisie of the Revolution, it is an excellent popular play for the Germans. This was proved to me at various times, by productions at Altorf: the parts were played by the Bourgeoisie and the people of the Canton; the public gathers to witness the spectacle, participates in the action, and echoes as it were the burning words of liberty. I believe that popular art can show no nobler figure than Tell, the German Hercules, the athletic dreamer, slow to make up his mind, possessed with a great but silent power, in whose mind thoughts and emotions sleep as in a majestic lake, the surface of which the winds can hardly ruffle, but which, once aroused, is like the sea. But the German elements in the play—the cold dissertations, the stolidity of character in the people, the sentiment, and romantic simplicity—would have to be deleted. And what remains? The other plays of Schiller would be of no use to us.

Among the men a little nearer our own time, some have attempted to write directly for the people: Raimund and Anzengruber in Austria, Tolstoy and Gorki in Russia, and Hauptmann in Germany. But even among the plays of these dramatists, such works as *The Weavers* and *The Power of Darkness,* long-drawn-out cries of misery and spectacles of abject horror, seem intended rather to awaken the consciences of the rich than to encourage and amuse the poor, who are already sore pressed under the burden of their existence. Or, at most, they

appeal to only a few among them, the radicals, the leaders of future revolutions. It is absurd to imagine that such pitiful spectacles could assume a place in the repertory of a people who have cast off the shackles of slavery. They are the nightmares which it is hoped they will shun. As for Anzengruber,[1] it seems that he wrote for a popular audience, and he has at least created a few popular types. Some of his plays are up-to-date by reason of their anti-clerical protest, but on the whole they are better adapted to the lower Bourgeoisie of Vienna than to the masses, for Anzengruber lacked the necessary genius to carry his local observations into the realm of the universal. He is an interesting example of a dramatist who avoided excess, and addressed the people without flattery and without contempt, exhibiting to them the spectacle of their own lives.

And finally, we come at the end of the century to the imposing name of the mighty Wagner. Wagner, the greatest composer since Beethoven, was at the same time the greatest dramatic poet since Schiller and Goethe. He has depicted unforgettable characters of superhuman dimensions, comparable to the heroes of antiquity: Siegmund, Siegfried, Brunnhilde. With one stroke he gave us a model play for a People's Theater in that brilliant fresco *Die Meistersinger,* a work overflowing with strength, humor, color, and movement. The people

[1] See M. Auguste Ehrhard's articles on Anzengruber in the *Revue d'art dramatique,* July-August, 1897.

literally overrun it in their tumultuous joy, while the good humor of the masses seems concentrated in the heroic kindliness of old Hans Sachs, who stands for the profound and serene conscience of the people. Unfortunately, Wagner's drama is indissolubly linked with music, a consideration of which we have avoided, for it complicates our inquiry. I think it useless to enter into the question at this time. The musical education of the people has scarcely begun in France, and many years must elapse before its completion. Until that time let us not trouble ourselves with the Wagnerian music-drama, though we may admit that that form of German art has a splendid chance to take root in French soil. At all events, if we need music, let us first offer the people the virile meditations and healthy sorrows of the most heroic of men, allowing Beethoven to precede Wagner.[1] Wagner's plays, in spite of their grandeur, are full of unhealthy dreams, reminiscent of their source—the aristocracy of a decadent art which had reached the last stage of its evolution, almost of its life. What profit can the people derive from the abnormal sentimental complications of Wagner, the excessive eroticism, the metaphysics of Valhalla, Tristan's death-scented love, the mystico-carnal torments of the Knights of the Holy Grail? It all flows from sources tainted with neo-Christian or neo-Buddhist refinement, translated into decidedly mortal and physical action,

[1] Certainly Meyerbeer and Adolphe Adam, so dear to the hearts of M. Bernheim and his associates.

and all set into a gorgeous framework, though the basis be rotten. In the name of Heaven, let us not give the people our diseases—no matter how complacently we may cultivate them ourselves! Let us strive to create a healthier and a better race!

CHAPTER VI

The Plays of the Past Offer No More than a Series of Popular Readings. No Material for a People's Theater. Readings are Not Enough: We Must Have a Theater

We have now come to the end of our rapid survey of the past. What remains of all the wealth that has been? A very few plays, not one of which we can use in its entirety: a repertory of popular readings, but no plays for a People's Theater.

Then why not resign ourselves, with Maurice Bouchor and many others, to the reading of plays in cut versions, accompanied by explanatory remarks, summing up the whole with a neat moral? In the first place, because—I say it frankly—we must consider not only the good of the people, we must respect art and the products of great minds. Among all man's creations, which alone give meaning to his existence, I have an unbounded admiration for the theater: it is man's statue, shaped by himself out of his own imagination, a flaming image of the universe, itself a greater universe. The equivocal dramatic reading is only a pale reflex of the actual theatrical performance, which stands in much the same relation to it as the photograph to the original, the pianoforte transcription to the

orchestral symphony. It cannot be denied that this is popularizing art, but if popularizing means vulgarizing, then we are opposed to popularization. It is our purpose to infuse new blood into art, and expand its narrow chest by giving it the health and strength of the masses. We are not offering the glorious products of the human mind to the people; we appeal to the people to serve the cause of art.[1]

But we believe we can better serve the cause of art through the medium of the People's Theater than by popular readings. No matter what charm the reader brings to his work, that work is still only a sort of primary education, thrusting as it does the teacher between art and the public. In spite of all, the reading is a sort of preachment—intended as such by the reader, for he wishes gradually to initiate the people into the wonders of art; but so careful is he, that he selects what he considers the best of the theater and gives it to the people without the dangers of actual theatrical production, without the flesh-and-blood suggestiveness of acting which he considers bad for his audience. But it seems to me that he merely substitutes one danger

[1] We must not forget Dickens, whose success as a public reader, first at Birmingham in 1853, but principally between 1858 and 1870, both in England and America, induced many others to follow in his steps. Certain Frenchmen, however, were before him. In 1848 E. Souvestre spoke before the workingmen of Paris in his *Lectures publiques du Soir* (see Sainte-Beuve: *Causeries du Lundi*, I, 275). At about the same time, Carnot offered V. Duruy the position of "Reader to the People" (see Paul Crouzet: *Littérature et Conférences populaires*).

for another, for the men and women of the Bourgeoisie are just as anxious to read and lecture as to act; they are born with the innate desire of exhibiting to a complacent audience their petty talents; speaking pieces and playing the piano. I am not sure which is worse, but I do know that there is more of the amateur spirit in the drawing-room than on the stage. I have often noticed the irritating effect produced by the reader in his effort to avoid placing a work of art fairly and squarely before his audience. He is forced to make humiliating explanations, and he little realizes that nothing is so offensive to the people as to be treated like children. They are furious when they perceive a bourgeois reader condescending to stoop to their level. This is what I object to in public readings, for the reader treats the people as if they were little children learning to walk. Put them in a theater and they will be forced to walk by themselves; and there is no better practice. The drama is a living example, contagious and irresistible; it exists in an atmosphere of glory, it is a battlefield where the people are thrust into the midst of human action in pursuit of the hero, for they admire him and wish to emulate him. The eloquence of the orator is the only rival to the theater in its effect on the masses; the public reading is nothing compared with it. The reader appeals to the senses indirectly; he touches only the brain, for he fears the rude shock of physical action. But this is cowardly. We must see to it that the physical well-being of the people is

looked after, for this is the basis of our whole civilization. It is the glory of the theater that it deals directly with the instincts, and portrays them vividly. Of course, we must try to perfect man—despite his character—by appealing to his intellect, but it is better to go straight to nature, for the truly great man is he who is great naturally, without realizing it. We recognize the temporary value of public readings: they are for the time being excellent propaganda. The entertainments where a little declamation and a bit of music are served up in a heterogeneous mass are perhaps necessary to stir the sluggish minds of the people who, through long attendance at cheap "shows," have lost the power of prolonged concentration. Let us take the readings for what they are worth: as a sort of supplementary night school, a preparatory course to the appreciation of true art. They are provisional quarters, constructed in great haste, erected for use until the permanent building shall be ready for occupancy. But let us not rest content with these wooden huts, and mistake the architect's shed at the foot of the cathedral for the cathedral itself.

CHAPTER VII

THE *TRENTE ANS DE THÉÂTRE* AND POPULAR GALAS

THE *Œuvre des Trente ans de Théâtre* claim to have erected such a cathedral, overnight, out of the chaotic ruins of the past.

In this movement we must distinguish the charitable from the purely artistic aims. "It was originally founded to supply emergency funds not only to needy authors and actors, both of whom have their own societies, but to anyone connected with the theater: authors, actors, critics, mechanics, scene-painters, and the like, any one of whom, after thirty years' work and struggle, might apply for assistance. Likewise those incapacitated for work by a death in the family, or illness."[1] Nothing could be more praiseworthy, and it is only surprising that the Parisians were so slow in offering assistance to those who had amused them for a lifetime. M. Adrien Bernheim deserves great credit for having instituted such a movement and devoted all his energies to make it a success. The man who does things, even though he be mistaken, is always better than he who only talks, no matter how well he does it.

[1] Adrien Bernheim, in *Trente ans de Théâtre* (1903).

I am not considering the charitable aspect, however, but the artistic, for the promoters of the *Œuvre* pretend to have founded a true People's Theater.

L'Œuvre des Trente ans de Théâtre, the organizers of which first met on December 30, 1901, made its bow in May, 1902, with five performances: at the *Théâtre de Montparnasse,* the *Théâtre de Grenelle,* the *Théâtre des Gobelins,* the *Théâtre de Saint-Denis,* and the *Concert Européen* in the Rue Riot. These performances consisted of selections from miscellaneous works, classic and romantic plays, operettas, vocal music, and dancing. Among the performers were Mlles. Moreno, Fugère, the Mante Sisters, Paulette, Darty, and Polin, not to mention the lecturers, without whom no fashionable function is complete! Then, in October, 1902, began the series of classic performances, with actors from the State theaters, the *Comédie-Française* in particular. During the first season, from October to June, there were twenty-five Popular Galas. *Horace* was given in the Salle Wagram, *Andromaque* and *Tartuffe* at *Ba-ta-clan, Le Misanthrope* in Bellevile at the *Bouffes-du-Nord,* the *Théâtre Marguéra,* and the *Théâtre Trianon; Le Malade imaginaire* at the *Salle Huyghens; L'Arlésienne* at the *Salle Humbert de Romans,* etc., etc. Dancing, fragments from operas, and the inevitable addresses, were likewise a part of all these programs.[1]

[1] This idea had already occurred to M. Camille de Sainte-Croix. In his articles contributed to *La Petite République*

And the names of all living composers and authors were systematically omitted in making up programs. M. Larroumet, the self-made godfather of the movement, says: "The great repertory went to the people, into their own neighborhoods, and in their own theaters."

But let us see how this worked out. We have already considered the "popular" performances of *Andromaque* and *Tartuffe*. Let me take the twentieth Popular Gala as a typical example. This took place Thursday, April 2, 1903.

The following prices were asked for seats:

Orchestra	Fr. 3.00
Balcony	2.50
First gallery	2.00
Remaining seats	1.00

This tariff is not excessive, but I must call your attention to the fact that at that time the cheapest seats at the *Théâtre-Français* (usual rates) were one franc, and at the *Odéon* fifty centimes. This is

in 1887, he suggested that companies of actors from the subsidized theaters should play in the outlying houses, but after studying the question he came to the conclusion that it was not worth while, and sought to realize a plan more truly popular. The same year, 1887, M. Ritt, director of the *Opéra*, submitted to Minister Fallières a scheme for a people's theater, for which the companies of the four State theaters would be called upon two days a week, and for two large symphony concerts. But he demanded a permanent theater, a personnel of singers, dancers, and musicians. This idea was further developed in 1902, before the Chamber, by M. Couyba, of the Department of Fine Arts.

the ordinary tariff. If, however, we turn to the reduced tariff at the *Odéon,* we shall find it lower than that at the *Trente ans,* orchestra seats costing only Fr. 2.50, the second and third rows of the balcony Fr. 2.00, the gallery and the remaining seats from Fr. 1.50 down to fifty centimes.

According to the diagram of the *Théâtre Trianon,* there are about 350 seats at Fr. 3.00, 180 at Fr. 2.50, 190 at Fr. 2.00, and 100 at Fr. 1.00. Altogether about 530 seats averaging over Fr. 2.00 each, and 100 averaging less. I do not think these very popular prices. And think of the difference in the seats! This inequality invariably arouses ill-feeling in an audience of workingmen, for they demand that all seats be equally good.

And to this tariff we must add from ten to twenty-five centimes per person for check-room fees, which might well amount to more than a franc for a family of three. There is also the *ouvreuse*—the woman-usher—who must needs extract her small profit. If all this is popular, I am indeed delighted, for it proves that the people are well-off.

But, as a matter of fact, the audience at the *Théâtre Trianon* was not composed of the people, but of the Bourgeoisie, whose fashionable clothes might well arouse envy in the breasts of an *Odéon* audience. It may be urged, however, that it is hard to distinguish a Parisian workingman from a bourgeois simply by his clothes. That may be true, but I can scarcely believe that any workingman would, after his day's labor, put on a frock coat and silk

hat to go to the theater. It was the Bourgeoisie, in its well-known uniform, which filled the theater from orchestra to gallery. By the way, it was significant that the Fr. 2.50 and Fr. 3.00 seats were filled and the Fr. 1.00 seats practically empty.

Ladies and gentlemen were seen gazing at one another through their opera-glasses while waiting for the curtain to rise. Of course, it rose late. The eternal address began at nine, and the play at half-past. There were two long waits, and the curtain finally fell at a quarter to twelve. Nothing could be better calculated to fit in with the workingman's hours!

After the address by the gentleman in black and the usual compliments to Cardinal Richelieu and the Company—I mean M. Adrien Bernheim and the *Œuvre*—actors from the *Comédie-Française* performed *Le Misanthrope*. The announcement of this play had a particular attraction for me. *Le Misanthrope* is, so to speak, Molière's *Wild Duck*, the poet's pessimistic and ironic work, in which the great man, after satirizing others, turns his shafts against himself. I was curious to observe the effect on the people—and lo, there were no people! Instead, the local aristocracy. They were very attentive and appeared intelligent and interested, but they evinced precious little pleasure. I felt that the audience was watching itself and not demonstrating its true feelings: they seemed to me like well-bred but humble hosts entertaining guests far above them in rank and name. They were appreciative and felt

flattered, taking good care not to show their boredom, applauding where applause seemed called for —after their guests had spoken. But we need proceed no further with our inquiry. M. Larochelle junior, a director of one of the outlying theaters, once said to M. Bernheim: "Molière and Racine will never succeed in these neighborhoods unless they are played by the *Comédie-Française*—and even then, not too frequently. Take my word for it. Be careful not to give them too many classics. One performance a season, or at most one every three months, will be quite enough." [1] I ask you, do two productions a year constitute a People's Theater? And these performances being as I have described them, are they really for the people?

The production of *Bérénice* at this same *Théâtre Trianon* (the twenty-fifth Popular Gala, June 17, 1903) is still more characteristic. Almost all the seats—*all* the orchestra and boxes—were reserved several days in advance. The audience included even fewer of the people than the one I saw at *Le Misanthrope*. Many were in evening dress, but there was not a single workingman anywhere. That made no difference to the lecturer, M. Auguste Dorchain, who addressed the fashionable audience as if they had been rough laborers; and it made no difference to the audience, who thought it a great compliment to be so treated, and wildly applauded him.—Who is wrong?

Such being the case, it is evident that the pro-

[1] In *Le Temps*, Feb. 12, 1903.

moters of the *Œuvre des Trente ans* could well afford to risk giving at a Popular Gala the most aristocratic of all Racine's plays, one that appears to have been written for the education of princes, one indeed which the present crowned heads of Europe—in Saxony and Serbia, for instance!—would do well to put into the hands of their sons ("For my sons when they reach the age of twenty"), and even contemplate themselves; but which has nothing to do with the people.[1] I wish to add that the pill was sugar-coated, for the tragedy was sandwiched in between two generous doses of stupid or light songs, and the hero of the occasion was—with Mme. Bartet—M. Polin!

Of course, not all the performances were like that at the *Trianon.* The one given on February 18, 1903, at the *Salle Huyghens,* for instance, where the *Comédie-Française* played *Le Malade imaginaire,* was a popular-priced production. And the audience was far different. In the cheap seats were to be found true representatives of the working classes—and in goodly numbers. Still, the majority of seats were occupied by the lower Bour-

[1] The program consisted of songs by Mme. Anna Thibaud and M. Cooper; *Bérénice* of Racine by the *Comédie-Française* and songs by M. Polin.

I do not here refer to literary performances, and there is too much to say about the musical programs. At least, the *Comédie-Française* and the *Odéon* have masterpieces in their repertories. But the repertories of our State theaters are littered with pretentious and stupid music: Meyerbeer operas, Adam opéra-comiques, etc., vapid things, without sincerity or style. Enough to kill all taste for music in the people.

geoisie. I admit that they are no less interesting than the people, as M. Nozière [1] affirms. But unless this so-called popular public is different from the public which frequents the *Théâtre-Français* and the *Odéon,* how can we progress? I listened carefully to the conversations carried on about me at these Popular Galas. At the *Salle Huyghens,* after *Le Malade imaginaire,* I heard two people comparing Coquelin's interpretation of the rôle there, and his usual performance at the *Théâtre-Français.* At the *Théâtre Trianon* my neighbors were still better informed: they had seen Silvain in his various rôles and knew how many years Dehelly had been with the *Comédie-Française.* Surely there is no need to erect people's theaters if the audiences are to be composed of such individuals. And remember, I am not speaking of the public in the best seats.

Or even admit that this venture—performers and public alike—are of the people. What does the experiment prove? You will recall the *Universités populaires,* and the victory they claimed; now they are practically extinct. You do not know how to observe the people. So long as they applaud you, you ask nothing more: you do not trouble to find out what they think. The people are respectful, and they believe in you, but neither their respect nor their faith is eternal. They spy on you, and they judge you. Three years ago, at one of the lectures given under the auspices of the *Universités populaires* where I was studying the public, I said

[1] In *Le Temps,* Feb. 23, 1903.

to the promoters of that scheme: "Take care. They are bored." And they replied: "But they applaud." They might almost have answered: "Let them be bored, provided they applaud!" And now they cease to come at all. I repeat again: "Take care. They applaud, but they are bored. They have come to see, but when they have come two, three, five, ten times, when they have seen what your classics are, your miserable handful of classics, they will cease to come." So would I. So *do* I. Yes, I admire the great classics, with the best of my intelligence. I fed upon them during ten years of my youth, and I often turn to them now when I am tired of life. But how far they are from this life, from my worries, my dreams, and my daily struggle for existence! As M. Faguet recently said, "What is *admirable* and what is *interesting* are two very different things." The sincere disciples of the classic writers do not deny that this difference exists, but they bravely maintain that interest is not an essential element in art. "I should say," declares M. Maurice Pottecher, "that one might even feel a little bored with a work of art, without ceasing to admire it and sensing its perfection. The sensation aroused by Æschylus, Aristophanes, Dante, Shakespeare, is far from the sentimental pleasure derived from a work capable of moving us to tears. But is a successful farce or a good melodrama better than *The Wasps* or *Hamlet?*"[1] Alas, it would at least enjoy the stupendous advantage over these master-

[1] In the *Revue d'art dramatique*, March 15, 1903.

pieces of being alive. No beauty, no grandeur can take the place of youth and life. Instead of disdaining life and allowing it to fall a prey to unworthy artisans, let us try to go to life; only you must not hope to be able to get it from those distant summits where rise, far from the turmoil of our present existence, the beautiful temples of the past. Let us not be afraid to confess it: your disinterested art is an art for old men. It is good, it is natural that we should look forward, after the accomplishment of our tasks, to the serenity of Goethe, to beauty, pure and simple. That is all very well for our declining years, but I pity the man or the people reaching that stage prematurely, without having deserved it. That man or that people will not experience the supreme beauty, and the serenity will turn to apathy, which is the herald of death. Life means constant making over, and it means struggle. Better the struggle, with all the suffering it entails, than a calm and beautiful death.

My People's Theater is of no party; it is limitless, eternal, universal. A noble dream, yes, but future generations will realize it, if they can, at the end of time. Meanwhile, let us endeavor to put a little of eternity into the fleeting moments of today; and live with our time. Art cannot draw apart from the aspirations of the epoch. The People's Theater must share the people's struggles, their worries, their hopes, and their battles. Frankly, the People's Theater must be of the people, or it will never thrive. You protest that the drama should

have nothing to do with politics, and yet you are the first—as I proved in connection with your performance of *Tartuffe*—to insinuate a political significance into your productions of the classics in order to attract the people. Do you deny that the politics you are fighting against is the politics which is directed against yourselves? You have felt that the People's Theater was about to come, and you hasten to take time by the forelock and establish a theater for yourselves in order to force your bourgeois theater down the people's throats. Keep it, we do not want it: *"The new has come, and the old has passed away."*

PART II

I

PRECURSORS OF THE PEOPLE'S THEATER: ROUSSEAU, DIDEROT, THE FRENCH REVOLUTION, MICHELET

Earliest Experiments in the People's Theater

The first men who appear to have conceived the idea of a new dramatic art for the new society, a People's Theater for the sovereign people, are among the precursors of the Revolution, the philosophers of the eighteenth century, whose epoch-making suggestions sowed in every corner of the earth the seeds for a new life: above all, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Diderot—Rousseau, who was always preoccupied with the nation's education, and Diderot, so anxious to enrich life, exalt its powers, and unite men in a Dionysiac and fraternal joy.

Rousseau, in his admirable *Lettre sur les spectacles,*[1] that profoundly sincere work in which some have pretended to discover a paradox in order to escape the application of its stern moral—Rousseau, after having analyzed the theater and the life of his day with the pitilessly clear vision of a Tolstoy, does not however conclude by condemning the stage in general, for he perceives the possibility of a regen-

[1] *Lettre à d'Alembert,* 1758.

eration of dramatic art, provided it is given a national and popular character, as with the Greeks. He says:

"I see for these ills but one remedy, and that is that we write our own plays for our own theater, and that we have dramatists in preference to actors. For it is not good to witness imitations of everything under the sun, but only of what is fitting for free men. The Greek plays, based upon the past misfortunes of the nation or the present faults of the people, might well offer useful lessons to the audience. . . . But the plays of the Greeks had none of the nastiness observable in the plays of our own time. Their theaters were not built for purposes of personal aggrandizement; theirs were not obscure prisons; the actors were not under the necessity of levying contributions on the audience, nor to count the number of spectators out of the corner of their eye, in order to be sure of their supper. Their grave and superb spectacles, given under the open heavens before the whole nation, presented nothing but combats, victories, prizes—things capable of inspiring emulation and sentiments of honor and glory in the breasts of all the people. These great plays were a constant source of instruction."

But Rousseau had another, a far more original and democratic idea for a people's theater: People's festivals. I shall touch upon this point a little later on.

At about the same time Diderot, the most enlightened and broad-minded of the geniuses of the

eighteenth century, and perhaps the most fertile, who was less concerned with the educational value of the stage than with the esthetic, said in his *Paradoxe sur le comédien:* "We have yet to discover true tragedy." And he added, in his *Deuxième entretien sur le Fils naturel:*

"Strictly speaking, there are no popular spectacles. The theaters of antiquity held as many as eighty thousand spectators at one time. . . . Think of the power in that great assemblage, when you consider the influence of one man on another and the immediate transmission of emotion in such crowds. Forty or fifty thousand people, gathered together, will not be restrained by motives of decency. . . . He who cannot feel within him an emotion arising from the fact that he is one of a great assemblage, must be vicious: his character has something solitary that I dislike. And if the size of this tremendous audience increases the emotion of the spectator, what will it not do for the author and the actor? How vastly different is our petty theater, wherein we amuse our audiences of a few hundreds at fixed times, and at fixed hours! What if we were to assemble the whole nation on holidays!"

And with his accustomed clear-sightedness and power he proceeds to sketch some of the artistic reforms which were to be the basis of the new theater. In the following lines Diderot saw a vision beyond not only the art of his day, but of our own:

"In order to effect a change in our drama, I ask

no more than a broad stage, where, when the subject demanded, the audience might see a wide space with several buildings at a time—the peristyle of a palace, the entrance to a temple—different places where the audience might observe every event of the action; while one section should be hidden for the use of the actors. Such was, or might well have been, the stage on which *The Eumenides* of Æschylus was performed. Shall we ever have anything of the sort on our stage? *There we can never show more than one action, while in nature there are many simultaneous actions, which, if performed at the same time, would intensify the whole, and produce a truly terrible and wondrous effect.* . . . We are waiting for the genius who will combine pantomime with dialogue, mingling dumb-shows with spoken scenes, and render effective the combination; above all, the approach, terrible or comic, to such simultaneous scenes."

Diderot's happy inspiration found a passionate echo in the Shakespearians of the *Sturm und Drang-periode:* Gerstenberg, Herder, and the adolescent Goethe.[1]

Louis-Sébastien Mercier, an original man, nour-

[1] Herder, in defending Shakespeare in 1773 and holding him up as the ideal dramatist, showed that his plots were not Greek in spirit, but belonged rather to the Middle Age. He said: "A sea of events, where the moaning waves follow each other; that is Shakespeare. Acts of nature come and go, act and inter-act, no matter how dissimilar they may be; create and re-create, and destroy in turn, in order to realize the ultimate intention of the Creator."

ished on Shakespeare and the Germans, disciple of Diderot and "monkey of Jean-Jacques," as he was called, brought together these various theories, and, in formal terms set forth in his *Nouvel essai sur l'Art dramatique* (1773) and the *Nouvel examen de la Tragédie française* (1778), demanded the establishment of a people's theater, inspired by and intended for the people. He reminded his readers of the mysteries of the Middle Age; and, combining the esthetic theories of Diderot and the Shakespearians with the moral ideals of Rousseau, he asked for a "theater as broad as the universe," which should also be "a moral spectacle"; for the first duty of the dramatic poet, he says, "is to mould the morals and manners of the citizens." And, practising what he preached, he wrote historical, political, and social plays: *Jean Hennuyer, évêque de Lisieux,* which introduced the figure of an apostle of tolerance at the time of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew; *La Mort de Louis XI, roi de France; La Destruction de la Ligue;* and *Philippe II, roi d'Espagne* (1785).

After Mercier, other French writers have taken up the idea of a national theater, that is, a theater for the whole nation. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, in his *Treizième Etude de la Nature* conjures up an ideal French Shakespeare who should give to the assembled people the great scenes of the *Patrie,* and suggests the subject of *Jeanne d'Arc.* After having traced in a rapid and declamatory style the scene of Jeanne at the stake, he says:

"I should like to see this treated by a man of genius after the manner of Shakespeare, who would not have failed, had Jeanne d'Arc been English, to make a great patriotic play out of it; the celebrated shepherdess would have become for us the patroness of war, as Saint Genevieve is of peace. Such a play would be performed only in national crises, in the presence of the people, just as Mahomet's standard is displayed in Constantinople. And I have no doubt that the sight of her innocence, her services, her misfortunes, and the cruelty of her enemies and horror of her martyrdom, our people could not restrain themselves from crying out: 'War! War against the English!'"

In 1789 Marie-Joseph Chénier dedicated his *Charles IX ou l'Ecole des Rois* "To the French Nation," with these words:

"Frenchmen and fellow-citizens: accept the dedication of this patriotic tragedy. I dedicate the work of a free man to a free nation. . . . Your scene ought to change with the others that have just changed. A theater in which there are only petty females and slaves is no longer suited to a nation of men and of citizens. There was one thing lacking to your dramatic poets; it was not genius, and not subjects, but an audience. (December 15, 1789.)"

And again he says:

"The theater is an agent of public education. . . . Without her men of letters, France would stand where Spain stands at this moment. . . . We have

reached the most important epoch of French history, for the destiny of twenty-five million men is about to be decided. . . . Free arts succeed the enslaved arts; the theater, so long effeminate and abject, will henceforward inspire only a respect of law, love of liberty, hatred of excess, and the execration of tyrants." [1]

Mercier's ideas were more directly influential upon Schiller in Germany. He read the Frenchman's books, translated them, and made them his inspiration. It is worthy of note that Mercier, in his *Nouvel Essai,* suggested to Schiller the theme of *Wilhelm Tell,* as Rousseau had suggested *Fiesco.*[2] And it is highly probable that Mercier suggested certain scenes of *Don Carlos.*[3] Nor must we forget the link that bound the early Revolutionary movement with the man whom the Convention made a French citizen, he who was in a way the great poet of the Revolution, as Beethoven was the great composer: the author of *Die Räuber* (1781-82), of *In Tyrannos* (*Against the Tyrants*), of *Fiesco,* "a republican tragedy" (1783-84), and of *Don Carlos* (1785), where he says he tried to show "the spirit of liberty at swords' points with despotism, the shackles of stupidity broken, the prejudices of a thousand years swept away; a nation demanding the rights of man; republican vir-

[1] *Discours de la liberté du théâtre,* June 15, 1789.

[2] See Albert Kontz, *Les Drames de la jeunesse de Schiller,* Leroux, 1899.

[3] *Eighth Letter on Don Carlos,* 1788.

tues put into practice "—the poet of the *Ode to Joy* (1785), drunk with liberty, heroism, and fraternal love.[1]

"The theater," declared Mercier, "is the most potent and direct means of strengthening human reason and enlightening the whole nation."

So thought the Revolution. It appropriated Rousseau's two ideas: popular festivals and education through the theater. The idea of a People's

[1] Goethe kept much farther aloof from the Revolutionary spirit, although one can trace its influence in *Egmont* (1788) where the dying hero says: "People, defend your rights! In order to save what you hold dear, die joyfully. I give you an example!" But the man who preferred injustice to disorder, he who could parody the Revolution in *Der Burgergeneral* (1793) and *Die Aufgeregten* (1793), was evidently unable to understand art for the people.

And yet, toward the end of his life, he began to have some ideas on the subject. We find traces of them in his *Conversations with Eckermann*. "A great dramatic poet, if he is at the same time productive, and is actuated by a strong noble purpose which pervades all his works, may succeed in making the soul of his pieces become the soul of the people. I should think that this was something well worth the trouble. . . . A dramatic poet who knows his vocation should therefore work incessantly at its higher development, in order that his influence on the people may be noble and beneficial." (April 1, 1827.)

And I notice in certain of Goethe's writings, for instance *Wilhelm Meister* (II, III, and following), short descriptions of people's performances. In a mountainous district (Hochdorf) some factory workers have converted a barn into a theater; there they act a comedy full of movement, but without characters: two rivals abduct a young girl from her guardian, and quarrel over her. A little farther on, he describes a sort of improvised popular production out-of-doors: a dialogue between a miner and a peasant.

Theater was not the exclusive property of any one party, for we find men of opposite and antagonistic creeds united in an effort to establish a popular form of dramatic art. Mirabeau, Talleyrand, Lakanal, David, Marie-Joseph Chénier, Danton, Boissy d'Anglas, Barère, Carnot, Saint-Just, Robespierre, Billaud-Varennes, Prieur, Lindet, Collot d'Herbois, Couthen, Payan, Fourcade, Bouquier, Florian, and many another, defended the cause in words, on paper, and with deeds. Here is a brief summary of certain Revolutionary documents touching on the people's festivals:

In a report dated July 11, 1793, relative to the festival in commemoration of the 10th of August, David suggested that after the ceremony in the Champ-de-Mars—which was to constitute the chief attraction—" a vast theater should be erected, where the chief events of our Revolution shall be represented in pantomime." As a matter of fact, they performed a mimic bombardment of the city of Lille.[1]

But on the 2d of August, 1793, the Committee of Public Safety, " desiring to mould further the sentiments and character of the French into a truer form of republicanism," proposed a " regulation of dramatic performances," which was adopted by the Convention after a speech by Couthon. The Convention decreed that between the 4th of August and the 1st of September—that is, at the time when the

[1] A fortress was especially erected on the banks of the Seine.

festivals celebrating the 10th of August drew to Paris many thousands of people from the provinces —certain theaters, designated by the municipality, should three times a week perform "republican tragedies," such as *Brutus, Guillaume Tell, Caius Gracchus* . . . one of these performances being given each week at the expense of the Republic." [1]

In November, 1793, following up the celebrated discourse by Marie-Joseph Chénier on popular festivals, Fabre d'Eglantine passed a measure providing for *national theaters,* which completed the scheme for popular festivals. A special commission of six members was actually chosen: Romme, David, Fourcroi, Mathieu, Bouquier, and Cloots. On the 11th of Frimaire, Year II (Dec. 1, 1793) Bouquier drew up the following resolutions in his *Plan général d'Instruction publique* (section IV: *Du dernier degré d'instruction*):

"Article I. Theaters . . . and festivals . . . are a part of the 'second degree' of public instruction.

"Article II. In order to facilitate this movement . . . the Convention declares that all former churches and ecclesiastical edifices which are at present empty shall belong to the Communes."

On the 4th of Pluviôse, Year II (Jan. 23, 1794) the Convention, under the presidency of Vadier,

[1] The first of these popular performances was given August 6 at the *Théâtre de la République. Brutus* was the play, and the announcement bore the inscription: *By and for the People.*

divided the sum of 100,000 livres among the twenty theaters of Paris which,

"according to the decree of August 2 have each given four performances for and by the people."

On the 12th of Pluviôse of the same year (Jan. 31, 1794) the Committee of General Surety recommended to the directors of the various theaters of Paris

"that they make their theaters schools of manners and decency . . . adding to their patriotic plays . . . others in which individual virtue should be set forth in all its grandeur."

Boissy d'Anglas, in a written appeal[1] to the Convention and the Committee of Instruction, dated the 25th of Pluviôse (Feb. 13), asked that

"plays should be made the vehicle of public appreciation, and that through them the prestige of the great men who had fallen should be emphasized, by showing their great deeds, which ought to be preserved for posterity. . . . In considering the theater as one of the properest instruments for furthering the development of society and rendering men more virtuous and more enlightened, you will, I am sure, not allow it to become solely an object of financial speculation, but make it a national enterprise. . . . Let this be one of the principal

[1] *Quelques idées sur les arts, sur la nécessité de les encourager, sur les institutions qui peuvent en assurer le perfectionnement et sur divers établissements nécessaires à l'enseignement public, addressées à la Convention nationale et au Comité d'instruction publique, par Boissy d'Anglas, député du département de l'Ardèche.*

aims of your public service. . . . In this way you will be opening up a path along which the human mind can pursue its way to even greater heights than heretofore . . . and offer the people an ever new source of instruction and pleasure, and form the national character as you wish."

All these ideas for a national theater which should be a source of instruction were combined on the 20th of Ventôse, Year II (March 10, 1794) in a decree of the Committee of Public Safety, which is the true constitution and basis of the People's Theater.

The Committee, which was that day composed of Saint-Just, Couthon, Carnot, Barère, Prieur, Lindet, and Collot d'Herbois, decreed that *the old Théâtre-Français shall be solely devoted to performances given by and for the people at certain times every month. The building shall bear the following inscription on its façade:* PEOPLE'S THEATER. *The troupes of actors already established in the various theaters of Paris shall be requisitioned in turn for performances to be given three times each decade. The repertory of plays to be performed at the People's Theater must be submitted to and passed by the Committee. Each municipality is commanded to organize productions which are to be given free to the people every ten years."*

The Committee of Public Safety realized that the transformation of the old *Théâtre-Français* for the purpose of giving popular performances was only temporary. The founders of the People's Theater were right in thinking that there were obstacles,

probably unsurmountable, to the establishment of a new form of dramatic art in an old building, whose material form, audiences, and traditions would always stand in the way of the development of a new art. And so they endeavored to find a new architectural structure.

On the 5th of Floréal, Year II (April 24, 1794), the Committee of Public Safety "called upon the artists of the Republic to assist in turning the Opera (now the *Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin*) into a covered arena, where the triumphs of the Republic and national festivals might be held"; and on the 25th of Floréal (May 14) Robespierre, Billaud, Prieur, Barère, and Collot signed a decree for the conversion of the Place de la Révolution (now the Place de la Concorde) "into a circus, open on all sides and intended to be used for the national festivals."

The mere founding of the People's Theater was not sufficient: it had to have plays. The Committee, composed of Robespierre, Couthon, Carnot, Billaud, Lindet, Prieur, Barère, and Collot, appealed to the poets on the 27th of Floréal to "celebrate the principal events of the Revolution and compose republican plays." But the Committee was too busy with other things—the struggle against the counter-revolution, and with the kings—to be able to devote its undivided attention to "the regeneration of dramatic art." It gave over this difficult task to the Committee of Public Instruction on the 18th of Prairial (June 6, 1794).

The Commission, of which the energetic and intelligent Joseph Payan was the soul, set to work in earnest. On the 5th of Messidor (June 23, 1794) it published a circular under the title of *Spectacles,* addressed to the directors and managers of plays, the municipal authorities, dramatists, etc. In this pamphlet, written in a declamatory and incorrect style, but burning with generous ambition, Payan declared war not only on the speculation indulged in by authors and directors, and on the scandalous immorality and huge profits of theatrical enterprise, but against the sluggish spirit of the times, and the servile condition of art. *"The theaters are still encumbered with the rubbish of the old régime, feeble copies of the masters, wherein art and taste are set at naught, of ideas and interests which are nothing to us, and of customs and manners foreign to us. We must sweep this chaotic mass out of our theaters.* . . . We must clear the stage, and allow reason to enter and speak the language of liberty, throw flowers on the graves of martyrs, sing of heroism and virtue, and inspire love of law and the *Patrie."* The Commission appealed to all enlightened men: artists, directors, and patriotic writers. "Think of the tremendous moral influence to be exerted by plays. We must erect a great public school wherein taste and virtue shall be equally respected." This was not an attempt, as has been said, to sacrifice art to politics. On the contrary, Payan, in the name of the Commission, vigorously protested against the mutilations made in the texts

of certain plays by the Hébertistes, saying that the "first laws to be respected in plays are the laws of good taste and good sense." The grandeur of his conception of a popular art is even more strikingly evident in a decree of the 11th of Messidor, Year II (June 29, 1794), wherein he pitilessly criticizes not the anti-republican plays, *but the republican plays* written for the *Festival to the Supreme Being,* which degraded the subject by their mediocrity.

"There are many dramatists on the alert to detect the current of the fashion; they know the costumes and the colors of the season; they know to the day when to put on one's red bonnet, and when to take it off. Their genius has laid siege to and conquered a whole city, while our brave Republicans have barely opened the breach. . . . Hence the corruption of taste and the degeneration of art. While genius meditates and casts her conceptions into bronze, mediocrity, cowering beneath the egis of liberty, bears off the laurels of the moment, and gathers without an effort the flowers of an ephemeral success. . . . Let us inspire our young literary men with the idea that the road to immortality is a difficult one, and that if they wish to offer the French people works as imperishable as their glory, they must avoid mere barren profusion and unmerited success, for these kill talent and cause genius to dissipate itself with a few fugitive sparks shot into a night of smoke; hasty attempts to snatch the wreath of victory, made according to a fixed formula, can only result in the degradation of the

work and the worker. The Commission deeply regrets that it is forced to point out the first steps along the path of good taste and true beauty by means of severe lessons, but since it assumes the greatest interest in the arts, the regeneration of which is in its hands . . . it feels it is responsible to the nation, to literature, to itself, to the poet, the historian, the genius, and should be guilty of gross neglect should it fail to direct the energies of genius. Let the young author, therefore, fearlessly measure the whole extent of the field before him . . . he must invariably avoid the line of least resistance in thinking, and shun mediocrity in every form. The writer who instead of lessons offers commonplaces; empty action instead of interest; caricatures instead of characters, is of no use to literature, to the moral welfare, and to the State: Plato would have banished him from his Republic."

The superb spirit of this passage shows into what hands art was then confided. Unfortunately the writers were not equal to the task: Payan himself was unable to write the work he announced in his decree of the 29th of June, on the regeneration of the theater. He was swept away on the 10th of Thermidor (July 28th) in the whirlwind which took with it, besides Robespierre and Saint-Just, the very genius of the Revolution. It is regrettable to have to confess that the artists of the time, especially the writers, could in no way be compared with the Revolutionary chiefs. This was especially true of the writers, for painting at least had its David,

and music Méhul, Lesueur, Gossec, Chérubini—and the *Marseillaise*. This mediocrity grieved the Committee, and called forth bitter words from Robespierre and Saint-Just. "Men of letters in general," said Robespierre in his speech of the 18th of Floréal (May 7, 1794), "have dishonored themselves in this Revolution, and to the everlasting shame of their minds the people's reason has taken the first place." As has been shown by Eugène Maron [1] and Eugène Despois,[2] the year 1793 marks the beginning of the extraordinary developments of the *vaudeville*.

But I understand: all the heroism of the nation had been flung into the battlefield, the assembly, and the riot. Who would have been such a dilettante as to write while the others were fighting? Cowards were the only ones who cultivated the arts. But is it not too bad to think that that sublime tempest passed away without leaving the trace of a work which shall live through the centuries?

Fifty years later one man sounded the echo of those first blasts. Michelet, who has transmitted to us not only the story of those heroic times, but the very soul, for it was in him; Michelet, who wrote the history of the Revolution like a man who had really lived through it, carries on, as it were instinctively, the tradition of the People's Theater. He expounded his ideas to his students with his customary eloquence:

[1] *Histoire littéraire de la Convention.*
[2] *Le Vandalisme révolutionnaire.*

"You must all march at the head of the people. Give them that glorious instruction which was the whole education of the cities of antiquity: a theater truly of the people. On the stage of that theater give them their own legends, and show them their own deeds. Nourish the people with the people. . . . The theater is the most potent agent in education and goes far to establish closer relations between man and man; it is, I think, the fairest hope of our national regeneration. I mean a theater universally of the people, echoing every thought of the people, and extending to every hamlet. . . . Before I die I wish to see a spirit of national fraternity in the theater . . . a drama simple and vigorous played throughout the countryside, where the energy of talent, the creative power which lies in the heart, and the youthful imagination of an entirely new people shall do away with mere physical adjuncts, sumptuous stage-settings and costumes, without which the feeble dramatists of this outworn age cannot take a step. . . . What is the theater? It means the resigning of oneself, the abdication of egotism and aggrandizement in order to assume a better rôle. Ah, how much we need this! . . . Come, I beg you, come and find your souls again in the people's theater, in the people themselves."[1]

Michelet suggested certain subjects from our national epic literature which lent themselves to treatment in people's plays: *Jeanne d'Arc, La Tour*

[1] Michelet, *L'Etudiant* (lecture-course of 1847-48).

d'Auvergne, Austerlitz; above all, *Les Miracles de la Révolution.*

It was through Michelet that the artistic ideals of the Revolution and the thinkers of the eighteenth century have come down to those of us who are endeavoring to found a People's Theater.

But other countries have anticipated our efforts. In 1889 a *Volkstheater* was established in Vienna; it opened with Anzengruber's *Der Fleck auf der Ehr!* In 1894 Herr Loewenfeld opened the *Schiller-Theater* in Berlin. A year later it had six thousand subscribers. A company of thirty actors played a repertory of ancient and modern plays: from Calderon and Shakespeare to Ibsen, Dumas fils, and the contemporaries. The theater was so successful that two other *Schiller-Theaters* were established in the same city.[1]

The art department of the *Maison du Peuple* of Brussels, which, since 1892 had offered literary and musical entertainments, joined hands in 1897 with the *Toekomst* (*The Future*), a Flemish choral and dramatic society, founded in 1883, and instituted a series of performances in the beautiful festival hall of the *Maison du Peuple,* which holds three thousand people.[2] The plays produced were: *The Weavers* of Hauptmann, *The Power of Darkness* of Tolstoy, *An Enemy of the People* and *The*

[1] For the *Schiller-Theater* see p. 102, note 1, and the articles of Jean Vignaud: *Un théâtre populaire à Berlin* in the *Revue d'art dramatique* (Oct. 5, 1899), and of Adrien Bernheim in *Le Temps* (1902).

[2] On the performances at the *Maison du Peuple* of Brus-

Master Builder of Ibsen, *Beyond Human Power* by Björnson, *Dawn* by Verhaeren, *Philaster,* translated from Beaumont and Fletcher by Georges Eekhoud, etc. At Ghent, the *Vooruit* offered classical concerts on *Mardi gras* and in 1897 produced *Tannhäuser,* as a protest against the orgies of the carnival. At Liège, a miner named Alphonse Bechon wrote *Le Bribeu socialiste ou les Martyrs de l'Ideie,* a democratic melodrama, "en treus akes et in apotheose," written in the dialect of the section. This was performed in 1902 at the *Maison du Peuple de Flemalle Grande.*

Switzerland has never abandoned the tradition of the great people's spectacles.[1] During

sels, see Jules Destrée, *Les Préoccupations intellectuelles, esthétiques et morales dans le parti ouvrier belge.* (In the *Mouvement Socialiste,* Sept. 1 and 15, 1902.)

[1]As early as 1545 we find a *Guillaume Tell* performed at Zurich. The movement for people's productions which was so strong at Bâle, Berne, and Zurich during the sixteenth century, was practically abandoned during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but with Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* it was revived and pursued with the greatest enthusiasm. Herr Stocker's book, *Das Volks-theater in der Schweiz* (1893), is a detailed study of this movement, which inspired the establishment of many *Dramatische Vereine* in the very smallest towns.—"The people's theater is one of the most vital and original traditions of Swiss art," writes M. René Morax. "Switzerland indeed never had any other theater. Neither national crises nor the nefarious blight of the Consistories could keep the Swiss from taking pleasure in these great spectacles, which included the plays of Ruff, the companion of Zwingli, the author of the first William Tell play from the beautiful tragedy of Théodore de Bèze, to the *Charles the Bold* of Arnold Ott." (*Journal de Genève,* May 5 and 8, 1907.)

the past few years these have been successfully revived.[1]

In France, the first man who was able to realize the ideals of a People's Theater was Maurice Pottecher. On September 22, 1892, the one-hundredth anniversary of the foundation of the Republic, he produced a patois translation of *Le Médecin malgré lui* at Bussang, a little village in the Vosges. It was a great success. Three years later, on September 2, 1895, he inaugurated his People's Theater —*Le Théâtre du Peuple*—at Bussang with a play of his own: *Le Diable marchant de goutte.* The stage, which was fifteen meters wide, was constructed against the side of a mountain, at the end of a field. Two thousand people were present at the first performance. Every year the Bussang theater offers two "dramatic days," in August and September; admission is charged on one of the days, when a new play is performed; there is no admission for the other, when the play of the preceding year may be witnessed. The theater is assured a repertory, for every year M. Pottecher writes a new play, sometimes two; M. Pottecher also acts, together with his family, and a company of workingmen and tradespeople from the village. His talent, his artistic conscience, his marvelous persever-

[1] I do not here refer to the traditional performances, like the Oberammergau Passion Play, and the *Maggi* (May festivals) of Tuscany, which have continued without interruption from the fifteenth, and perhaps even the fourteenth century, to our own days. These are written and played by the peasants around Pisa, Lucca, Pistoia, and Siena.

ance, have brought him the success he deserves, and will reserve for him a place of honor in history as the founder of the first People's Theater in France.

At about the same time Louis Lumet went from neighborhood to neighborhood in Paris with his *Théâtre civique,*[1] whose function it was to offer artistic recitations and selections from plays, rather than integral performances.

In Poitou, the happy success of a topical play, a pastoral by M. Pierre Corneille, performed before a few peasants, led the author to found a People's Theater at La Mothe-Saint-Héraye. He organized this theatre in September, 1897, and made his début with *La Légende de Chambrille.* In September, 1898, he produced *Erinna, prêtresse d'Hésus,* a tragedy of classical model.

M. Le Goffic and M. Le Braz organized at Ploujean in Brittany (August, 1898) a production of an old sixteenth century mystery, *La Vie de Saint-Gwénolé.*

Shortly after, M. Emile Loux-Parassac founded a *Théâtre des Alpes* at Grenoble, where he produced a play dealing with the life of the people of Vallouise. He introduced old airs, romances, and Alpine dances, as well as the *Bacchu-Ber,* or sword dance.

And finally, the various performances at Nîmes,

[1] This was founded on July 3, 1897, by the little *Enclos* group: Louis Lumet, Charles-Louis Philippe, J.-G. Prod'homme, and Charles Max.

Béziers, and Orange,[1] although they are almost ruined by the combined Provençal and Parisian influences, and fluctuating in their choice of plays from *Les Précieuses ridicules* to *Le Châlet* of Adolphe Adam, from the *Phèdre* of Racine to the *Iphigénie* of Moréas, the *Œdipus* of Sophocles to that of Péladan—these performances none the less serve the cause of the People's Theater in its mani-

[1] The Roman theater at Orange was reopened in 1869, I think, with the singing of a cantata, *Les Triomphateurs,* of Antony-Réal, and the *Joseph* of Méhul. Adam's *Le Châlet* was given in 1874; *Les Précieuses ridicules* in 1886; then followed a series of classic or pseudo-classic tragedies: *Œdipus, Antigone, Alcestis, The Phœnician Women, Athalie, Phèdre, Horace;* and the *Orphée* and *Iphigénie en Tauride* of Gluck. Lately there were three series of productions within a few weeks, and the variety of programs was disconcerting. In 1903 alone there were performances of *La Légende du cœur* by Jean Aicard, *Œdipe et le Sphinx,* by Joséphin Péladan, *Citharis* by Alexis Mouzin, *Iphigénie* by Jean Moréas; *Horace, Phèdre, The Phœnician Women, Orphée,* etc. In place of these antique imitations and absurd transpositions of parlor tragedies, I should like to see genuine Provençal plays, like Mistral's *La Reine Jeanne.*—See Léopold Lacour's articles, *Au Théâtre d'Orange* and *Le Présent et l'avenir* (in the *Revue de Paris,* Sept. 1, 1903), and *Les Théâtres en plein air* (in *L'Art du Théâtre,* Oct., 1903).

The performances in the arena constructed by M. Castelbon de Beauxhostes at Béziers have up to the present been exclusively musical; at first they were devoted to the music of M. Saint-Saëns (*Déjanire* and *Parysatis*) with few exceptions (such as the *Prometheus,* music by M. Gabriel Fauré, and libretto by MM. Jean Lorrain and Ferdinand Hérold). The more recent productions, at Nîmes, have not been so distinctly alive. M. Mounet-Sully acted in *Œdipus* there, which was preceded by a prologue from the pen of M. Maurice Magre.

fold attempts.[1] There are other experiments: at Nancy and at Lille; in Flanders, in Limousin and Gascony, in Provence, in the Basque country; and at the People's Universities—the *Emancipation* of the fifteenth arrondissement of Paris produced Jean Hugues'[2] *La Grève* in 1900. Especially significant is the work of the *Coopération des idées* of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, founded in 1886 by workingmen.[3] M. Deherme, the true founder of the People's Universities, established in connection with this movement an eclectic theater in 1899.

The fault with all these attempts was that they were isolated, disconnected, without cohesion, without sufficient publicity and the strength to combat the traditional routine of actors and the indifference of the public. In March, 1899, a small group of young writers on the staff of the *Revue d'art dramatique* planned to organize at the Exposition of 1900 an international congress for the purpose of

[1] See *La Revue universelle,* July 6, 1901.

[2] *Cahiers de la Quinzaine,* 6th *cahier* of the 3d series.

[3] "A few workingmen, coming to the conclusion that the very brief education given to their children was far from sufficient and therefore somewhat dangerous, and wishing to avoid the oppression of the electoral organizations—where much is said and little thought—came together with their books and their ideas, and agreed to meet regularly one night a week for the purpose of discussion. They first met in the back part of a wine merchant's shop, in 1886, Rue des Boulets." (Henri Dargel: *Le Théâtre du peuple à la Coopération des idées,* in *La Revue d'art dramatique,* April, 1903.) Such was the beginning of the *Coopération des idées,* the name of which was taken from a paper started by M. Deherme in 1894.

uniting the efforts of the world toward a true democracy of art. This convention was to have been preceded by a questionnaire sent to all who took any interest in the question, and asking the directors of all people's theaters for an account of their work and suggestions resulting from their experience. This would have afforded ample material for discussion at the convention. But for reasons independent of the wishes of these writers, the project, which was indeed too ambitious, had to be abandoned. Six months later, however, the plan was revived, only the field was more restricted, and the subject confined to the People's Theater of Paris.

On the 5th of November, 1899, the *Revue d'art dramatique* published an open letter to the Minister of Public Instruction asking him to lend his aid for the establishment of a People's Theater in Paris. This aid was to have taken the form of sending a delegate to foreign countries,—to Berlin, in particular—to study the organization of the existing people's theaters. At the same time the *Revue* offered a prize of five hundred francs to the person who contributed the best plan for a people's theater. The jury consisted of Henry Bauer, Lucien Besnard, Maurice Bouchor, Georges Bourdon, Lucien Descaves, Robert de Flers, Anatole France, Gustave Geffroy, Jean Jullien, Louis Lumet, Octave Mirbeau, Maurice Pottecher, Romain Rolland, Camille de Sainte-Croix, Edouard Schuré, Gabriel Trarieux, Jean Vignaud, and Emile Zola. The

Committee met a dozen times in the offices of the *Revue d'art dramatique,* between November, 1899, and February, 1900. A delegation was sent to Minister Leygues. This gentleman recognized the importance of a People's Theater in Paris, but the only aid he offered was that of words; while he bent every effort to keep the projects of the People's Theater out of the hands of so advanced a party as the writers on the *Revue d'art dramatique.* They had asked for a delegate to study people's theaters abroad; the Minister appointed M. Adrien Bernheim. M. Bernheim was present at a meeting of the Committee in December, 1899, but agreement was impossible. M. Bernheim left for Berlin, and the Committee proceeded with its task. Much more solidarity in the Committee would have been necessary to struggle successfully against the meddling of the State; and the Committee disbanded at the end of three months, after having reported on the prize contest. Twenty manuscripts had been submitted, out of which four or five were of interest, while that of Eugène Morel was remarkable. Three prizes were awarded. Morel's work was published in December, 1900,[1] in the *Revue d'art dramatique.* To this day it remains the most original plan of its kind so far as the physical conditions are concerned. To the same review, Romain Rolland contributed a study on the moral conditions and repertory of the People's Theater, and on the 30th of December

[1] Eugène Morel, *Projet de Théâtres populaires* (published by the *Revue d'art dramatique*).

he gave at Louis Lumet's *Théâtre civique,* under the auspices of the *Nouveau Théâtre,* a people's performance of *Danton,* for the benefit of the tulle-making strikers. The play was preceded by an address from Jaurès. A year later, on the 21st of March, 1902, the author of *Danton* produced at the *Théâtre de la Renaissance-Gémier, Le 14 Juillet,* a "people's play." This was inspired by the artistic and civic ideals of the men of the Committee of Public Safety. "To revive the forces of the Revolution," the preface stated, "to awaken once more the heroism and the faith of the nation when it was in the midst of the republican struggle, in order that the work interrupted in 1794 might be taken up and completed by a people of greater maturity and more conscious of its destiny: such is our ideal."

The tentatives of the *Revue d'art dramatique* found an echo in the Chamber in M. Couyba's report on the Fine Arts budget for 1902, and in his speech of the 5th of March during the same year. But it was easy to see how Minister Leygues and his clever delegate, M. Bernheim, were laboring to direct the forces of democratic art into the coffers of the State. The plan was classic—like their repertory. But in spite of their political game, which was upheld by the bourgeois press, I very much doubt whether they will have the last word against the irresistible power of a movement which increases in proportion as it is opposed. The people can no longer be deceived. No one who is really concerned about the people's art will allow himself

to be duped by any such trick; and their determination to establish a true People's Theater at Paris is not in the least shaken.[1]

But meantime, while we wait, with fewer illusions perhaps and more experience, for them to take up the temporarily interrupted projects, the People's Theater slowly develops, here and there. Among the more or less happy experiments undertaken in this period of reaction, we may point to the *Coopération des idées,* the *Théâtre populaire* of Belleville, and the *Théâtre du Peuple* of M. Beaulieu.

On December 3, 1899, the People's Theater of the *Coopération des idées* opened its doors at number 157 Faubourg Saint-Antoine. Since that time there has been a series of almost continuous performances. Unfortunately the hall was too

[1] I need only to recall the press campaign carried on for many years by Camille de Sainte-Croix, Lucien Descaves, Gustave Geffroy, Jean Jullien, Octave Mirbeau, and the studies and questionnaire of Georges Bourdon in the *Revue bleue.* Ever since the stormy performances of *Thermidor* at the *Comédie-Française* in 1890, M. Camille de Sainte-Croix has not ceased his demands for a republican theater on behalf of the republican people of Paris. He saw that the people were excluded from the State theaters because of the reactionary spirit of the so-called upper classes. Since 1900 he has labored to secure a State appropriation for the establishment of four large people's theaters, devoted to dramatic and lyric, classic and modern productions, one for each of the outlying districts of the city. He submitted a report of his inquiries to the Chamber and Municipal Council. The State at once appeared interested—but this was merely in order to suppress it the more effectively.

small—seating as it did only from three to four hundred people—and inconvenient. The strange mixture of all sorts of plays is also open to criticism. Among the dramatists represented were Corneille, Racine, Molière, Marivaux, Regnard, Beaumarchais, Musset, Ponsard, Hugo, and Augier. Courteline is a favorite, together with Tristan Bernard, Labiche, and Grenet-Dancourt. Rostand and Pailleron are also performed, and even the lightest comedies of Capus, Meilhac, Porto-Riche, Véber, and Francis de Croisset. Among the more truly popular plays may be mentioned Maurice Pottecher's *Liberté,* which was seen at the opening performance; *Les Mauvais bergers, L'Epidémie,* and *Le Portefeuille* of Mirbeau; Brieux's *Blanchette,* Descaves' *La Cage* and *Tiers état;* François de Curel's *La Nouvelle idole:* a number of plays of Jean Jullien (among them *Le Maître*), Ancey, Marsolleau, Trarieux, Henri Dargel; Jean Hugues' *La Grêve,* and Romain Rolland's *Les Loups.* I have already said enough of such indiscriminate eclecticism to enable me to dispense with further criticism. Even for the cultured few this is sufficiently thin fare, but it may prove fatal for a new and ignorant public: they risk being overwhelmed by so great a collection of contradictory and varied styles and sentiments. But we cannot deny the vitality and good spirit behind this artistic venture. During the first three years of its existence the little society produced about two hundred plays, of which thirty were in more than three acts, some of them

entirely new. Nor were actors wanting. There were sufficient for four companies at one time, recruited from among the audiences of the *Coopération* and the various troupes of people's actors who lent their aid from time to time, and the students from the *Conservatoire* who acted *Horace* with others from the *Comédie-Française*. This is a true People's Theater in the making; all that lacked was a larger and more accessible hall.

There was another attempt to form a People's Theater. The *Théâtre populaire* was opened in September, 1903, in the very heart of the workingmen's quarter in Paris: number 8, Rue de Belleville.

The director of this theater, M. E. Berny, is an intelligent and daring young man, part of whose inspiration was doubtless derived from the projects exposed in the questionnaire of the *Revue d'art dramatique*. The hall, which was provided with a single gallery, held between a thousand and twelve hundred spectators. In case the experiment had succeeded, it was planned to add two more galleries, which would have enabled the theater to accommodate between eighteen hundred and two thousand. The prices ranged from twenty-five centimes to one franc fifty. A subscription plan enabled the theater to risk a few rather daring experiments. These subscriptions were fifteen and twenty francs for twenty performances. The workingmen were allowed to pay for the subscriptions in weekly instalments. Block subscriptions were likewise offered to the various syndicates, workingmen's associa-

tions, and People's Universities. The theater offered Thursday matinees to students at greatly reduced prices: twenty-five and fifty centimes. The repertory changed from week to week; it was eclectic, and endeavored to supply the moral needs, a purpose which no People's Theater worthy the name can afford to lose sight of. M. Berny did not hesitate to go to the classic drama, but he selected his plays with discretion and taste, for he tried at first not to break away too abruptly from the people's cherished melodrama. He succeeded gradually in developing the taste of his audiences by giving them modern plays, forcing them to think, and he called upon living writers for plays dealing fearlessly with present-day problems.

M. Berny's theater opened September 19, 1903, with Courteline's *Monsieur Badin,* Mirbeau's *Le Portefeuille,* and Romain Rolland's *Danton.* Eugène Morel delivered an introductory address on the People's Theater before an audience composed—at last!—entirely of the people.[1] M. Berny also produced Daudet's *Sapho,* Maupassant's *Boule de Suif,* Jean Jullien's *Le Maître,* Emile Fabre's *La Rabouilleuse,* and Sardou's *Madame Sans-Gêne.* During his first season he produced sixty-one plays (one hundred and fifty-five acts in all), with ninety-three actors, before 135,000 spectators. His theater, ideally situated in the center of the workingmen's quarter, where the inhabitants are wide-awake, rap-

[1] Eugène Morel, *Discours pour l'ouverture d'un théâtre populaire,* in the *Revue d'art dramatique,* Oct. 15, 1903.

idly gathered to itself an interested and exclusive clientele of *people.* I have more than once enjoyed the opportunity of watching these audiences—especially at performances of *Madame Sans-Gêne* and at the premiere of a Jean Jullien play. I was struck by the keen interest displayed everywhere about me, often taking the form of audible expression, where someone would agree or disagree with a character. I am told that at *Danton* the audience roundly berated the Revolutionary figures who displeased them: Vadier, Fouquier-Tinville, etc. At one performance of *Madame Sans-Gêne* I saw them on the point of hissing Napoleon when he reproached the heroine for being a washerwoman. They always took sides, they were incapable of remaining neutral. This Belleville People's Theater has a public of quick intelligence. I watched especially the young men and women, people with splendid faces, but many of them pale and pinched and worn with the fatigue of constant labor. Beneath the transparent and mobile faces there seemed to float great waves of desire, and care, and changing moods of irony. A truly intelligent class—almost too intelligent—with a touch of the morbid: the people of a large city. And this public might in a few years' time become the ideal audience: intellectual and passionate.

A few weeks after the opening of this *Théâtre populaire,* M. Henri Beaulieu, an actor of talent, opened on November 14 a second *Théâtre du Peuple,* in the *Théâtre Moncey,* in Clichy. It was

an advance-guard experiment. The price of seats ranged from fifty centimes to two francs. A hundred free tickets were to be distributed on certain days of the week among the poor children of the primary schools, and to certain workingmen's societies, soldiers, etc. There were Thursday matinees of French and foreign classics, in a subscription series costing ten francs for twelve performances. A subscription series for the premieres of new and original works (of which at least six were promised) was an inducement offered to the "cultured few." The other arrangements of the theater were modeled after the Berlin *Schiller-Theater:* the payment of dividends to the actors, suppression of the ushers' nuisance, a maximum charge of ten centimes for the checking of wraps, and the installation of a permanent exhibit of pictures, models, photographs, etc.

It was M. Beaulieu's idea—by no means the least original of his project—to send companies from his theater into the Socialist and labor centers of the provinces, and into the neighboring countries: Lyons, Saint-Etienne, Lille, Brussels, Geneva, etc.

His repertory included a large number of thesis-plays, but always of an artistic character. Among others, he was to have produced Hauptmann's *The Weavers,* Heijermans' *The Good Hope,* Emile Fabre's *La Vie publique,* Octave Mirbeau's *Les Mauvais bergers,* Tolstoy's *The Power of Darkness,* Anatole France's *Crainquebille,* Ajalbert's dramatization of the Goncourts' *La Fille Elisa,* Ver-

haeren's *Le Cloître,* Brieux' *La Robe rouge,* Sudermann's *Honor,* Romain Rolland's *Danton,* comedies of Courteline, etc. The theater opened with Zola's *Thérèse Raquin,* and offered as the first season's novelty Lucien Besnard's comedy *L'Affaire Grisel.*

But success did not respond to the effort. The situation of the building—in the Avenue de Clichy —was not so good as that of the Belleville theater. One of the first cares of the founders of any new people's theater should be the study of the neighborhood in which they plan to begin, and the hall in which the plays are to be performed. In a city the size of Paris, with its manifold complexities, there is as much difference between one neighborhood and another as between two provinces. I do not mean that one cannot change one's public; on the contrary, I think that this is the purpose of all true art; art, that is, that refuses to pander to the public. But of course this transformation requires much time and trouble. M. Beaulieu spared no pains, but time and funds were limited. He found, too, a spirit of the bitterest opposition. The neighborhood of the Batignolles is like a little provincial town, and the people were hostile to everything that came from the outside. The Bourgeoisie refused to come to a theater where they could not reserve seats in advance, and the few who did come looked at the scale of prices in the box-office and said: "It must be poor if the seats are so cheap!" But the worst enemies of the venture were the people them-

selves. They refused to be merely the people. They said to M. Beaulieu:

"People yourself! We're as good bourgeois as you!"

I presume that if he had wished to force them to go to his theater he would have had to call it *Theater of the Bourgeoisie!* [1]

Here we come to the most difficult part of our problem, one which threatens to destroy all attempts to establish a people's art at Paris. The people of Paris seem to have lost all sense of class distinction. The demoralizing atmosphere of a city rolling in luxury, pleasure, and business, appears to have debilitated all the inhabitants. Or, to be more exact, there are two peoples in Paris: the one that has just emerged from a state of downright poverty, and is at once taken into the Bourgeoisie. The other is vanquished by its more fortunate brothers, and is in a state of abject misery. The first will not have a people's theater, and the second obviously cannot attend one. The Bourgeoisie tries to annihilate one and assimilate the other. But it is our political and artistic ideal to bring together these two peoples and give them a collective sense of their party. And in this respect we agree with the aims

[1] Perhaps it will not be amiss to state the extraordinary effect of some of these plays on the audiences of the Batignolles. They were frankly hostile to *Thérèse Raquin;* they misunderstood *La Vie publique;* the irony of *Boubouroche* was too much for them. On the other hand, they enjoyed *La Robe rouge, Honor, Le Dépit amoureux,* and, above all, *The Weavers* and *La Fille Eliza.*

of Syndicalism. Not that we are endeavoring to set one class against the other, but because we wish to establish the greatest harmony among the various forces of the nation; to this end, we would have each of the constituent elements—above all, that in which the strength is greatest—preserve intact its individuality. Just as, while we are striving to found a new Europe in which the thought of the Occidental races shall be common to all, we wish each race, far from losing its character and forgetting its past glory, to bring what is most glorious and lay it on the common altar of humanity.

II

THE NEW THEATER

Moral and Physical Conditions

Such, briefly, is the history of the first attempts to create a People's Theater in France. They are the direct result, as we have seen, of the great democratic traditions of the eighteenth century philosophers and the men of the Convention. There remains for us to state our conception of this new theater.

The economic aspects of the question have received adequate treatment at the hands of Eugène Morel.[1] Of course, I do not invariably agree with him. For instance, Morel believes in the theater for its own sake: "The more theaters the better. The more people, the better. I consider quantity, not quality." On the contrary, I think only of quality, and not at all of quantity. I have no faith in a theater without an ideal. I should not trouble my head about the people if I thought they might become merely another Bourgeoisie, as vulgar in their pleasures, as hypocritical in their morality, as stupid and apathetic, as the actual Bourgeoisie. Little

[1] Letter from Eugène Morel to Georges Bourdon (in the *Revue bleue,* May 10, 1902).

would I care to prolong an art of empty nothingness, and a class of people which seems at the edge of the grave. But if I have much less faith in the absolute worth of art than Morel, and much more in a moral and social revolution of humanity, I cannot help admiring the originality with which he has attempted to solve the problem of popular art. His *Projet de théâtres populaires,* so far as material organization is concerned, is a genuinely original contribution, full of fertile ideas; his novel suggestions are rendered more valuable by a judicious sense of the practical requirements. I need not analyze that work here: it should be read from cover to cover. I shall content myself with exposing its principal outlines.

M. Morel places his People's Theater on a financial basis by means of subscriptions. "Taste can only be formed by the constant sight of beautiful things. Education requires repetition. In order to exercise any appreciable influence over the public, you must always have a public. Occasional festivals may be more imposing, but their influence amounts to nothing." [1] The subscriptions were for weekly performances. "This is the most regular form of subscription, the one best calculated *to form the habit.*" And Morel proposes to issue 25-franc

[1] I do not altogether agree with Morel. One has only to recall the profound and lasting effect of a few occasional spectacles on the mind of a child unused to entertainments of the sort. It is true, however, that they do not form *the habit.* I think it necessary to introduce regular festivals as a matter of education.

certificates the coupons from which may be used as tickets from week to week. By an additional payment of ten francs, an original purchaser may renew his subscription after he has used his first twenty-five tickets. I need not enter into detail as to Morel's methods of easy payment, which he has further simplified by reducing expenses. This he has done by discounting authors' royalties and suggesting a reform in the Public Charities' taxes, which under the present system make a People's Theater almost impossible to run. "And finally," he concludes, "we are not establishing a charitable institution; but we must have a system whereby very few families would be too poor to go to the theater; and, consequently, the theater, far from being a luxury, would actually develop a sense of thrift and economy."

The renewal of subscriptions under this system would naturally reduce the income for the following year, but now it will be seen that the People's Theater is not a single isolated institution. "The moment it succeeds the profits must go to the founding of another theater, in a different neighborhood. In this way, a play will no longer be performed only seven days, but fourteen, and the capital required for the foundation of the original theater replaced out of the profits of the second. The second, then, making use of the material as well as the actors of the first, will have no trouble in starting, and will be further enabled to profit by the experience of the one before it. The use of the

same costumes and scenery in the second theater will further reduce the expenses." These theaters are to be organized not only throughout Paris, but in every province of France. "We wish to cover France with theaters." The theaters would be so closely allied that actors, costumes, and scenery would be common property, under the administration of a central committee and its representative, the director. The State would have nothing to do —except to lend its aid in collecting the subscriptions, and its influence to insure the carrying out of the principles laid down by the founders. It is asked for no endowment, and no guarantees. The People's Theaters are to be independent, and the State is only to stand by and see that they are well run.[1]

[1] It is interesting to compare this with the organization of the *Schiller-Theater* of Berlin. This theater is based on the subscription plan. Subscriptions are payable quarterly and cost five marks; one ticket entitles the bearer to five seats (including program, cloak-room fees, etc.). There is no State endowment. The capital is supplied by stockholders, who are the trustees, the president of whom is the director. His salary is 10,000 marks a year. If the profits exceed 5 per cent on the capital, they are given not to the stockholders, but to the actors and employees who are most deserving. The director, Herr Loewenfeld, guarantees his company—in December, 1899, there were twenty-two men and twelve women—salaries not exceeding 8,000 marks, one month's vacation a year, and costumes for the actresses. I have already stated that at the end of the first year Herr Loewenfeld had 6,000 subscribers. The *Schiller-Theater* gave 380 performances in eleven months: 319 evenings, 49 matinees, and 12 performances for students; 37 plays were produced, of which two were new; 25 evenings were devoted

I have said enough of this plan to show its originality, and I may now proceed to study it more closely.

Supposing that the capital is secured and the public ready. What conditions are necessary to a real People's Theater?

I shall not try to lay down absolute rules of procedure: we must remember that no laws are eternally applicable, the only good laws being made for an epoch that passes and a country that changes. Popular art is essentially changeable. Not only do the people feel in a manner far different from the "cultured" class, there exist different groups among the people themselves: the people of today and the people of tomorrow; those of a certain part of a certain city, and those of a part of another city. We cannot presume to do more than establish an average, more or less applicable to the people of Paris at the present time.

The first requisite of the People's Theater is that it must be a recreation. It must first of all give pleasure, a sort of physical and moral rest to the workingman weary from his day's work. It will be the task of the architects of the future People's Theater to see that cheap seats are not instruments of inquisitorial torture. It will be the task of the

to poetry readings, one to the recitation of fables, and one to Christmas stories. No play may be performed more than twelve times, and the programs change daily. The theater is used during the day for expositions and lectures. The *Freie Volksbühne* of Vienna began by renting productions from other theaters, and giving Sunday matinees.

dramatists to see that their works produce joy, and not sadness and boredom. The greatest vanity or else downright stupidity are the only excuses for offering the people the latest products of a decadent art, which produces evil effects sometimes even on the minds of the torpid. As for the sufferings and doubts of the "cultured," let them keep these to themselves: the people have more than enough already. There is no use adding to their burden. The man of our times who best understood the people—Tolstoy—has not always himself escaped this artistic vice, and he has bravely humbled himself for his pride. His vocation as an apostle, that imperious need of his to impose his faith on others, and the exigencies of his artistic realism, were greater in *The Power of Darkness* than his fundamental goodness. Such plays, it seems to me, discourage rather than help the people. If we offered them no other fare, they would be right in turning their backs on us and seeking to drown their troubles at the cabaret. It would be pitiless of us to try to divert their sad existences with the spectacle of similar existences. If certain of the "cultured few" take pleasure "sucking melancholy as a weasel sucks an egg," we at least cannot demand the same intellectual stoicism from the people. The people are fond of violent acts, provided they do not, as in life, crush the hero. No matter how discouraged or resigned the people are in their lives, they are extravagantly optimistic where their dream-heroes are concerned, and they suffer when a play turns out sadly. But does this

mean that they want tearful melodramas with uniformly happy endings? Surely not. The crude concoction of lies that forms the basis of most melodrama merely stupefies them, acting as a soporific, and contributes, like alcohol, to general inertia. The factor of amusement which we have desiderated in this art should not be allowed to take the place of moral energy. On the contrary!

The theater ought to be a source of energy: this is the second requisite. The obligation to avoid what is depressing and discouraging is altogether negative; an antidote is necessary, something to support and exalt the soul. In giving the people recreation, the theater is obliged to render them better able to set to work on the morrow. The happiness of simple and healthy men is never complete without some sort of action. Let the theater be an arena of action. Let the people make of their dramatist a congenial traveling-companion, alert, jovial, heroic if need be, on whose arm they may lean, on whose good humor they may count to make them forget the fatigue of the journey. It is the duty of this companion to take the people straight to their destination—without of course neglecting to teach them to observe along the road. This, it seems to me, is the third requisite of our People's Theater:

The theater ought to be a guiding light to the intelligence. It should flood with light the terrible brain of man, which is filled with shadows and monsters, and is exceeding narrow and cramped. We have just spoken of the need of guarding against

giving every product of the artist to the people; I do not wish, however, to imply that they must be spared all incentive to thought. The workingman does not as a rule think while his body is working. It is good to exercise his brain and, no matter how little he may understand, it will afford him pleasure, just as violent exercise is always gratifying to any normal man after prolonged inaction. He must be taught, then, to see *things* clearly as well as himself, and to judge.

Joy, energy, and *intelligence:* these are the three fundamental requisites of our People's Theater. So far as a moral purpose is concerned—lessons, that is, in virtue, social solidarity, and the like—we need not bother much about that. The mere existence of a permanent theater, where great emotions are shared and shared often, will create at least for the time being a bond of brotherhood. In place of virtue, give them more intelligence, more happiness, and more energy: virtue and moral lessons will take care of themselves. People are not so much downright bad as ignorant: their badness is only the result of ignorance. Our great problem is to bring more light, purer air, and better order into the chaos of the soul. It is enough if we set the people to thinking and doing; let us not think and do for them. Let us above all avoid preaching morality; only too often have the truest friends of the people made art repellent to them by this means. The People's Theater must avoid these two excesses: moral pedagogy, which seeks to extract lifeless les-

sons from living works (a stupid thing to do, for the keenly alert will immediately scent the bait and avoid it), and mere impersonal dilettantism, whose only purpose is to amuse the people at any cost—a dishonorable thing, with which the people are not always pleased, for they can judge those who amuse them; and often there is a mixture of disdain in their laughter. No moral purpose, then, and no mere empty amusement, in and for itself. Morality is no more than the hygiene of the heart and the brain.[1] Let us found a theater full to the brim with health and joy. *"Joy, the abounding strength of nature . . . joy, which turns the wheels of the world's clocks; joy, which revolves the spheres in space; joy, which brings forth the flower from the seed, and suns from the firmament!"*

Such are the *moral* requisites—moral in the sense I have just indicated—of our new Theater. We must now consider the very important question of *physical* requisites.

Regarding the architecture of the hall, Morel is in favor of the trapezoidal form, like the Bayreuth Theater and the *Maison du Peuple* at Brussels. M. Gosset, an architect, proposes a series of semicircular steps in the form of an amphitheater, divided into two or three floors. I myself have no preference. The essential point is that all the seats be equally good. This is why none of our old theaters, so odiously aristocratic, could be used as People's

[1] "The ineffable joy we feel when we are perfectly healthy in mind and spirit." (Schiller to Goethe, Jan. 7, 1795.)

Theaters, even with considerable changes. We might however use our circuses. Nor shall we achieve a true brotherhood among men or develop any truly universal art until we have done away with the stupid system of orchestra seats and boxes, and the resultant antagonism between classes. I would have at most only two kinds of seats: first, practically all the seats in the hall, and then a few reserved at the back for families. The workingman who returns home late has no time to dress, and he may not feel altogether comfortable if he is forced to show himself in his everyday clothes: the reserved seats will allow him to see without being seen. I am not sure but that this condition would help the people in the matter of pride in their personal appearance: this would not be one of the least advantages of our People's Theater.

As for the stage, it should be so constructed as to allow masses of people to act on it: fifteen meters wide (with a movable proscenium arch in order to make the opening smaller on occasion), and twenty deep. Morel demands a perfected system of machinery, with *Versenkungen* as used in Germany, England, and America; the revolving stage, the use of which allows the poet free rein. Surely there is no reason why an entirely new theater should not have these latest mechanical devices, unless their installation should require too great an outlay. But I cannot help remarking that, for my part, I do not insist on them. Georges Bourdon writes that "this great mechanical evolution will perhaps appear only

a tiny advance in the near future." I believe that an almost total suppression of mechanical devices would be a decided step in advance, and just as influential in the evolution of the art of the stage. I recall Michelet's words: "A drama simple and vigorous, played throughout the countryside, where the energy of talent, the creative power which lies in the heart, and the youthful imagination of an entirely new people will do away with mere physical means, sumptuous stage-settings, and costumes, without which the feeble dramatists of this outworn age cannot move."

Art would have everything to gain if it cast aside this childish luxury to which it has become enslaved, that is valueless except to those whose brains are withered and people who can in no wise feel the true emotions of art. Certain performances given by the *Œuvre des Trente ans de Théâtre* have very easily done without stage-settings; and we know that rehearsals without costumes and scenery have frequently produced an impression a hundred times more profound and lasting than the most elaborately contrived production. I have often tested this out for myself, in our regular Paris theaters as well as in People's Theaters like that at Bussang. Scenery is a convention, and the only ones who are ever deceived are either the very simple, or those who are least so. The latter do not interest me at all, and as to the former, well, the people have no monopoly of them: for while the masses are more simple than we, they are not more childlike. Simplicity is either

a very rare natural gift—such simplicity as we find in the people—or else it is merely the result of lack of experience in theater-going. But we maintain that the people are used to going to the theater, or that they soon will be; it is therefore futile to count upon their simplicity: in this year of 1903, the simplest public is that thronging the boulevards, night after night, to see a comedy of M. Capus. After all, I am not so much opposed to the use of scenery and elaborate costumes as to the scandalous and useless excesses they entail, which no well-organized society should tolerate, and which have nothing to do with art. My People's Theater shall have nothing but a large hall, like the *Salle Huyghens,* or a public meeting-place like the *Salle Wagram*—preferably with a slanting floor, allowing every spectator a full view; at the end of this hall there must be a high and wide platform.

As I see it, there is but one primary physical requisite for a real People's Theater: the stage and auditorium must be large enough to accommodate large masses of people.[1] The other requisites are

[1] The people's performances and festivals of Switzerland deserve further study. Many useful things may be learned from them, in particular what they call the "chemin de cortège." This is a long and winding pathway, which leads from one of the large doorways on either side of the stage (and *off-stage*), and comes down, *outside* the proscenium. This is where armies enter, combats are fought, and cavalry charges introduced. In this way large mobs of people can easily be manipulated without confusion and the illusion is the better preserved. In outdoor performances this "chemin de cortège" is often an ordinary country road, and leads in

corollaries of this. Plays performed before thousands of spectators must be adapted to the sight and hearing.

In his *Essais sur la musique,*[1] Grètry draws an interesting sketch of a new theater wherein he attempts to reconcile his minor art of graceful sentiment with the democratic aspirations of his time. He gave proof of his common-sense in indicating the necessary relations existing between architecture and the drama. These pages are well known to musicians, but it will not be amiss to bring them to the attention of literary men:

" Why does one so often hear people coming from the theater say ' What a bore! ' It is not always that the play bored them, or that the actors were poor, though *they* are invariably blamed; it is above all because there is very rarely established any true relation between the constituent elements of the performance, stage, and plays produced on the one hand, and the means of producing them on the

from the woods and fields. The Swiss use scenery even in their outdoor productions, but the mixture of paint and natural scenery is shocking to me. I know that Maurice Pottecher agrees with the Swiss, and believes that this produces beautiful effects. Possibly some happy combination will one day be found, but with a new art of scene-painting, and real architectural structures, and a special science of outdoor optics. But up to the present, the results have been atrocious. There is nothing lovelier than the natural horizon, prairies, far-off hills, harmonizing with a wall or two towers (as in certain of the Swiss *Festspiele*).

[1] Bk. IV, Ch. IV. The volume was printed at the expense of the State, by the Committee of Public Instruction, on the suggestion of Lakanal.

other. Take a large hall, if you will, but let the orchestra be correspondingly large, and not play soft plaintive airs. If I must guess what the orchestra is playing, I am bored. Great mass effects and sweep are what are needed; and everything that is to be seen and heard at close range must be eliminated. Plays in which the love interest assumes a prominent place—plays of intrigue, that is, with familiar and pastoral subjects, can only be made effective by means of a thousand details of facial expression, asides, and so on; just as no musical composition can be properly understood or interpreted except by a thousand trills, pizzicati, and arpeggios; all these details, if set forth within the framework of a small stage are effective, but if performed in a large hall, are quite lost. Can we have auditoriums for our musical tragedies? Yes, but the poet must remember these points: first, he must treat only well-known stories, for in these the language may be brief; second, he must introduce only great masses, broad tableaux set off with much pomp, marching, sacrifices, combats, dances, and pantomimes—but each of these must be short, as they are only accessory to the principal action; third, that every lyric must be simple and contain no more than a single thought. If he observe these rules his work will gain in power, rapidity, and variety, elements demanded in all large spectacles. The composer will write music only of a broad and simple character; harmony and melody must have sweep, and all detail which would be in place in more

intimate music must be eschewed. Very few complicated basses, unless the theme be simple; no roulades in the singing; and almost always must the words correspond exactly with the music; that is, in syllabic combination. Everything must be large, for remember, this is a picture to be seen from a distance. You must *paint with a broom.* Since the words intended to be sung express but one idea, and since the composer has only to think of the unity of his composition and is not forced to fill it with affected quips and turns, he will usually adopt such a meter or rhythm that he shall require no other throughout the whole piece. Gluck realized this, and he was truly great only when he limited his orchestra and his singers to simple unity."

With very few reservations (necessary only because Grètry wilfully limits musical drama to his own capacity) these are sound reflections, profound even, and are as applicable to the drama as they are to music; we have only to apply them. Yes, "Everything that is to be seen and heard at close range must be eliminated."—"Great mass effects and sweep," and "You must *paint with a broom.*" Farewell, complicated psychology, insidious and vicious and obscure symbolism—the whole art of the boudoir and drawing-room! Or, rather, let it continue its moribund existence in the out-of-date theaters. But it will be ostracized from our art, as something tiresome and absurd. Our People's Theater is led to seek by force of circumstances the freedom of the Greek theater. Broad action, faces with

elementary and conventional features, but vigorously molded; the basic passions, throbbing to simple but forceful rhythm: frescoes, not easel-paintings; symphonies, not chamber music—a monumental art for the people, and by the people.[1]

By the people! Yes, because there can be no great popular work except where the poet's soul collaborates with that of the nation, and receives nourishment from the passions common to all. The bourgeois critics maintain that nothing so attracts

[1] Here again we may profitably turn to the performances in Switzerland, some of which, like those at Lausanne, are given before 20,000 spectators. Here are a few points which struck me:

1. It is not true, as some musicians have maintained, that these huge theaters cannot be used except for musical productions. If the acoustics are normal, the spoken word carries as far as the sung declamation, and much better than the orchestra, which, in outdoor theaters, should be reduced to the woodwinds and brasses: stringed instruments are almost lost.

2. It goes without saying that the actor cannot observe the usual rules for speaking. He must stand well forward and articulate clearly. Consequently it is necessary to simplify the action, eliminate long dialogues. Dialogue must be clearly marked. There must be few words, and few gestures, but these should be expressive; vigorous concentration of action, passion, and style.

3. Music is a great help—but in the background. It ought to be merely the basis of the fresco, the support to the action, the atmosphere. It should impregnate each scene with the proper color, and never attract attention to itself, on pain of ruining the play. In a word, the music must be intelligently and disinterestedly administered. (But of course I am demanding an impossibility!)

4. A theater of this sort requires powerful fresco effects.

the people as novels and plays in which the heroes are of the upper classes, because the description of a richer society makes them for the time being forget their own misery. This is possibly true, so long as the people are reduced to the condition in which they now live; but the moment they become conscious of their own personality and realize their civic dignity, they will blush at the thought of having read that servants' literature. It is the duty of those who love the people to develop their taste.

Great masses of the people are used, as individuals are in our ordinary theaters. Group dialogues must be introduced, double and triple choruses, but care should be taken not to return to neo-classic archaism, as Schiller did in his *Braut von Messina.* Each group should also be allowed the greatest liberty within itself. Individual conflicts should little by little give way to mass conflict. Broad sweeping lines. Vigorous dramatic struggle. Large light-and-shade effects. It is impossible to describe the overwhelming effect of absolute silence succeeding a tumult. The Greeks realized this. The instinct of the Swiss peasant also.

5. We are beginning to see experiments in this monumental and statuesque art, and a new dramatic art is emerging. It seems as if Diderot's theory of "double action" is at last being realized (see p. 66). The great size of the Swiss and Bavarian theaters (especially at Oberammergau) are such as to allow various episodes simultaneously on different levels of the stage. Here the Virgin in tears seeks her son, while there we see Christ in a street of Jerusalem, bearing His cross. Cæsar is seen going to the Capitol, while inside the palace the conspirators are making their preparations. These are different aspects of the drama, all happening at the same time. The play is immensely richer in effect, and the sight of Destiny reaching out for blind man is truly terrifying and magnificent.

I do not mean that the people must necessarily participate

The people must not of course see only themselves represented in their drama, but they ought to be raised from the humiliating position they have so long occupied on our stage. They must no longer be depicted as skulking valets, spying out their masters' secrets. Let them participate as citizens of the universe, in the great spectacle of the universe! Let all classes be shown on the stage, just as all should be in the auditorium, but as brothers and equals, and not as rivals. Let the people be shown the great men of the world, kings, ministers, and conquerors—not because they were the people's masters, but because they represented the State—the

in the action, or that popular dramas require actors from among the people. This is a most complex question, involving not only esthetic but moral problems. In the case of exceptional festivals there is nothing more natural than that the people should participate—as in Switzerland, where all the rôles are played by the people or the bourgeois of the Canton without distinction of class. In a case of this sort, the dramatic action is a *real* action, and participation in it is no more than the duty of a citizen. But in the case of a regular theater, participation on the part of the people is in many ways inconvenient, and more trouble than it is worth. It keeps them from their work, or else imposes an unreasonable amount of it on them; but above all, it is likely to render them vain and insincere. Art gains nothing; or if it did, it would be at too great cost. Here I agree with Maurice Pottecher, who uses actors from the people for extraordinary festivals, but is opposed to using them for a Parisian People's Theater. "Why go to the trouble, in a city which has already so many professionals? At best you would have only a few mediocre amateurs, and increase the number of cheap actors." (*Le Théâtre du Peuple,* in the *Revue des deux Mondes,* July 1, 1903.)

commonwealth of which they, the people, are today the inheritors. In a word, let everything be presented to the people, but only on the condition that they see themselves somewhere in it, and through the present and the past become part of the universe, and that all forms of human energy may flow through them toward the common weal.

III

TYPES OF PEOPLE'S DRAMA

Melodrama

The People's Theater is the key to a new art world, which art has hardly caught sight of. We have reached a parting of the ways, beyond which lies an almost totally unexplored land. Two or three more venturesome spirits have gone ahead. But the instinct of the people should have guided these artists. The people speak frankly, and their preferences leave no possible room for doubt. But what artist cares in the least what the public wants? They consider it contemptible not to feel contempt for the people.

Mocked at or disdained, little do the people care! For the last hundred years they have remained faithful to the entertainment so despised by the delicate: the circus, the pantomime, the burlesque, and the melodrama. That is, if not simple plays, these arouse simple emotions, simple pleasures—good and bad—but still simple, appealing to the soul through the senses.

In Greece the theater was popular. What were the plays of the Greeks? It has been fashionable

of late to adapt the Greek tragedies. *Œdipus the King* has in this way been given new popularity. But the witty critics, wishing to show that they cannot be deceived, took great pains to point out that *Œdipus* was fundamentally nothing but melodrama (with a secret pride, no doubt, in having convicted Sophocles of his inferiority to the modern dramatists). They are not mistaken in calling the play melodrama: *Œdipus* is a melodrama, and one of the most horrible of its kind. The *Oresteia* is another, but not even M. d'Ennery would have dared write such sensational horrors as are found in this trilogy.

The Elizabethan drama of England was people's drama. From time to time certain of Shakespeare's plays are produced here. The critics can never sufficiently praise the marvelous acting, the exquisite setting, the able stage-management, the exquisite music, and the admirable translation (though sometimes they attribute to Shakespeare the inventions of the translator!); but they seem to insinuate that Shakespeare is very lucky indeed to be produced with all these elements of success, without mentioning the greatest of all: the prestige of age. They insinuate that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is nothing but farce, and *Macbeth* a melodrama with ridiculous bloody ghosts, remorse, and all the sickly-conscience paraphernalia—a regular *Ambigu* "melo." And of course, people of taste cannot help laughing at the wholesale slaughter at the end of *Hamlet*. When *King Lear* is produced the audience is spared

the mad ravings of the King and Cornwall's horrible atrocity to Gloster.

Irony, contempt, or fashionable enthusiasm! This was the lot of the people's plays, and it still is. There is no doubt a great chasm between the sublime melodramas of Shakespeare and Sophocles, and our cheap manufactured products, all cut to a pattern. But without troubling to consider the scribblers who write melodramas—and they are worse than the rest because they rob the poor—let us study the type, and learn the true reason for its success.

"Take two sympathetic characters, one the victim, the other a sinister and hateful villain; introduce a few grotesque figures out of everyday life, a few timely political, religious, or social allusions; mix tears with laughter, and add a song with an easy chorus. Five acts in all and as few waits as possible." Here is your recipe.

It is easy to criticize melodrama, but, as has been observed by M. Georges Jubin [1] in a very intelligent little article on melodrama, "even in making fun of it, you will have discovered the law of the People's Theater. You will learn that four things are necessary to please the people: the mixing of laughter and tears; the interlude; the presence of evil but with the hint that good will prevail; and a long evening's entertainment which is worth the price of admission. In other words: *Mingling of pleasing and painful emotions, True realism, Simple morality,*

[1] In the *Revue d'art dramatique*, Nov., 1897.

and *Getting one's money's worth.* The dramatist must think of this last point if he is in earnest, and wishes really to found a People's Theater."

First, then, the necessity for varied emotions: the people come to the theater to *feel,* and not to learn. Since they give themselves up entirely to their feelings, they demand that the emotions offered them be varied, for prolonged sadness or gaiety would be too great a strain. They seek relief from laughter in tears, and from tears in laughter.

Second, the necessity for true realism. One of the principal reasons for the success of a melodrama lies in the scrupulous exactitude with which such and such a well-known place is reproduced: a cabaret, a market, a pawn-shop, or the like.

Third, the necessity for simple morality. The popular public demands, not as a result of their simple-mindedness but as a sort of hygiene, some support for the innate conviction in every one of them that good will eventually triumph over evil. It is right that they should feel this, for it is a law of life and progress.

Fourth, the necessity for a square deal. There exists an implicit agreement on the part of dramatists and directors not to rob the public by keeping them shut up in a theater for four hours and giving them less than two hours' actual entertainment. The people come to the theater to see the play, and not, as in the ordinary playhouses, to exhibit themselves, to gossip, or to flirt.

Which of the two publics cares more about art?

Are not the rules we have just outlined legitimate, human, and vital? It only remains to apply them with artistic integrity. The dramatists have only themselves to blame if modern melodrama, which is left to the first comer, is so stupid. Let them improve it! Let them stop writing the facile outmoded plays now in fashion, and turn their efforts to writing people's plays, ridding these of the accumulated crudeness that generations of unscrupulous purveyors have allowed to infest them; let them put truth and body into the form, and embellish it with dignified French. They would derive no less benefit than the people themselves, for they would escape the fashionable and consequently the transitory, and come nearer to the eternal realities of mankind.

As a matter of fact, there is no form so difficult and so sublime as great poetic melodrama. A perfect specimen is the product of genius. The form cannot be reduced to rules. To put the great and simple passions into the breasts of great and simple human beings as universal as Romeo, Macbeth, Othello, and Cordelia, to extract from the naturally developed story or the conflict between human beings true tragic action, to write a play that blinds with its light and groans as from a convulsion of nature—no one can do this unless he is a superhuman creature, an Æschylus, a Shakespeare, a Wagner. For such there is no rule.

It only remains to express the hope that our poetry may come a little nearer to the tragic in

daily life, and extract from it the eternal elements, the mystery, the music of the soul. The greatest of our French dramatists—Balzac, a novelist by the way!—affords us a splendid example of this. Our modern life is teeming not only with tragic beauty, but with poetically fantastic forces, close akin to the legends of antiquity. Says Gabriele d'Annunzio: "One has only to watch the confusing whirlwind of living things pass by, watch them in that spirit of fancy Leonardo speaks of when he advises his disciples to observe the cracks in the wall, the ashes on the hearth, the clouds, the mud, and to listen to the bells—to discover *invenzioni mirabilissime* and *infinite cose.*" [1] Life is for everyone, but how few know how to use it!

[1] From the Ashburnham MSS. of Leonardo da Vinci.

IV

TYPES OF PEOPLE'S DRAMA

Historical Drama

There is another type of drama which we may here consider, one in which Shakespeare excelled: the historical drama. The author of *Henry IV* and *Richard III* created a national epic covering English history from King John to Henry VIII, including the Wars of the Roses and Agincourt.

The historical play is a new type to us. Our French dramatists have neglected the form. There is a treasure-house of passions in our history, waiting to be thrown open to our actors as well as our public, who know so little of it, and that little so badly. France has perhaps the most heroic history of any since the days of Rome. Nothing that is human is foreign to her. From Attila to Napoleon, from the fields of Catalauni to Waterloo, from the Crusades to the Convention, the destinies of the world have been fought for and decided on her soil. The heart of Europe beat within the breasts of her monarchs, her thinkers, and her Revolutionary leaders. No matter how great this people has been in the realm of intellect it has been preëminently great in deeds. Action is the most sublime creation

of France, its theater, its drama, its epic. France accomplished what other nations dreamed. We never wrote an *Iliad,* but we have lived a dozen; the Iliad of Charlemagne, of the Normans, of Godfrey of Boulogne, of Saint Louis, of Jeanne d'Arc, of Henry IV, of the *Marseillaise,* of the Corsican Alexander, of the Commune, and even in our own days, of Africa. Our heroes have touched the heights as often as our poets. No Shakespeare has celebrated their achievements; but Le Béarnais at the head of his band, or Danton on the scaffold, have spoken and acted genuine Shakespeare. During her existence France has touched the heights of happiness and sunk to the depths of despair; her story is a vast Human Comedy, a series of dramas where strong wills command whole armies of passions. Each epoch is a different poem, and yet throughout them all one is conscious of the persistence of indestructible characteristics, the destiny of a race: this is the grandiose and magnificent unity of the epic.

All this marvelous material remains untouched by French art; for we really cannot count the dime-novel dramas of Dumas the Elder, the sensational trifles of Sardou, and—*L'Aiglon!* The only writers who, like Vitet,[1] really understood the historical drama, were contemplative souls, who never intended their plays to be acted. "There is something false, something insulting to the intelligence in the disproportionate attention paid nowadays to

[1] Vitet, *Les Barricades* (May, 1586), *Les Etats de Blois* (Dec., 1588), and *La Mort de Henri III* (Aug., 1589).

the historical anecdote, the trifling incident of the past at the expense of what is vital and living in history. It is not our intention to give the dilettante of this sort of history a frigid miniature, interesting as a matter of fashion and local color; we must rather resuscitate the forces of the past, and revive their motive power to action."[1] "The drama of our day," wrote Schiller, "must combat the torpor, the sloth, the lack of character, and intellectual vulgarity of the day; it must therefore exhibit strength and character; it must stir and exalt the heart. Pure beauty is limited to the happy nations. When the poet addresses a generation of sick or troubled people, he must stir them with the greatest emotions." He must offer them an heroic art.

May the People's Theater create a great historical drama in France! The aristocratic poets have failed, in spite of their efforts. This failure might have been expected, for plays of this sort demand the spirit of a whole nation; without it you cannot do other than write conventional poems, of interest only to the erudite members of an academy.

No other sort of play is better adapted to the Theater we are seeking to found. Without considering the communicative emotion which is invariably aroused in the people by witnessing actual events rather than by seeing fictitious adventures; without considering the illusion, more nearly complete than in any other literary invention; without considering

[1] Preface to my play *Le 14 Juillet.*

the magnetic force of example, and of the action which irresistibly springs from action, historical drama enjoys the inestimable advantage of shaping the conscience and the intelligence of the people.

The majority of those who take it upon themselves to educate the people demand that the drama shall offer a cut-and-dried solution to the problems of the day. Leaving aside the fact that some problems cannot be solved at present, and that it would be most unwise to try to hasten their solution, there is nothing more fatal to education than to impose ready-made formulas on the people. What really matters is the development of their minds through the intelligence, and the training of the powers of observation. History will teach them to come out of themselves, and observe the souls of others—friends and enemies alike. They will once more find themselves in the past, where characters are much the same as they are now, only different in appearance, with the same vices and weakness as themselves; and these they can recognize and possibly guard against. The confession of their own faults will perhaps induce them to be lenient toward others. The perpetual train of varying ideas, customs, and prejudices set before them may perhaps show them that their own ideas, customs, and prejudices are not the center round which the world revolves, and that justice and reason cannot be founded upon a few pharisaical rules; to contemplate transitory things, and not mistake them for eternal.

But this knowledge of the past does more than instil lessons of tolerance: such indulgent skepticism is but the first step. The spectacle of change only increases the solidity of what remains unchangeable. It is one of the chief assets of history that it separates the rock from the sands that cover it. In place of the blind instinct of the mob it furnishes the moral unity of the family, cemented by the triple bond of blood, thought, and trials shared. It need not of necessity awaken fanatic chauvinism, but only a spirit of fraternal solidarity among all the men of one nation. Let each individual realize the links binding him to the community, and may his life become richer from his knowledge of the lives that have been and are to be. With such a conscience, he will see more urgent reasons for action.[1] The spirit which is evoked out of past centuries is for the centuries to come. If we would create strong souls, let us nourish them with the strength of the whole world.

The world—for the nation alone is not enough. A hundred years ago the enlightened Schiller said: "I write as a citizen of the world. Early in life I exchanged my fatherland for humanity."[2] Almost a century ago, the serene Goethe said: "National literature means very little today: world literature is at hand, and each one must labor to make it an ac-

[1] "History is to the people what memory is to individuals: the thread connecting our yesterday with our today, forming the basis of our very existence and, through experience, constituting the means of all perfection." Lamartine, in 1864.

[2] 1783.

complished fact."[1] And he added: "If I am not mistaken, the French will reap the greatest benefit from the movement."

Then let us realize his prophecy! Let us lead back the French to their own history, which is the source of a people's art; but let us take care not to exclude the historic legends of other peoples. Undoubtedly, our own history lies nearer our hearts, and our first duty is to develop it. But the great events and deeds of all the nations must find a place on our stage. As Cloots and Thomas Paine were elected members of the Convention; as Schiller, Klopstock, Washington, Priestley, Bentham, Pestalozzi, and Kosciusko were made French citizens through Danton's decree—let the heroes of the world become our heroes likewise. May France be their second fatherland, especially for the people's heroes. The People's Theater shall be open to everyone who is of or for the people. Let us construct in Paris an epic of all Europe.

[1] Goethe to Eckermann, Jan. 31, 1827. And elsewhere in the *Conversations* he says: "Ampère stands indeed so high in culture that the national prejudices, apprehensions, and narrow-mindedness of many of his countrymen lie far behind him; and in mind he is far more a citizen of the world than a citizen of Paris. But I see a time coming when there will be thousands in France who think like him." (May 4, 1827.)

"It is evident, and has been for a long time, that the greatest geniuses of all nations have kept all of humanity before their eyes. You will invariably perceive this general idea standing out above national ideas and the peculiarities of the writer. . . . The most beautiful works are those which belong to all mankind." (In *Notes and Fragments,* apropos of Carlyle's translation of German novels, 1827.)

We must also be careful not to remain merely the singers of the past. The new energy we shall generate must not be allowed to stand idle. Action must spring from the spectacle of action. Once we have gathered our forces and become conscious of our power, let us march forward! Armed with all the greatness of the past, we shall strive to create the new man, a man of stalwart moral fiber and of truth. The story of past heroism, such as I have described it, is not a lantern hung from the rear end of a train, casting an uncertain light over the road that has been traveled; it is a lighthouse in the night, marking the position of the ship in the ocean, whence it comes and whither it is going. Separated from the past, the present has no meaning, just as the past is without significance apart from the present. Both past and present must unite to give meaning to the greatest thing of all: Life. The life of all time must be consolidated into a unified whole, one being with a thousand bodies, and strive from every direction to attack the universe, which some day it will dominate.

V

OTHER TYPES OF PEOPLE'S DRAMA

The Social Play
Rustic Drama
Legends and Tales
The Circus

What We Might Have in a People's Theater

I have thus insisted upon the historical drama because I confess to an especial fondness for it, and why should I not speak of what I know best? Besides, it was necessary to defend not the form itself (because we have no historical plays in France) but the disrepute into which some of the Romantics have thrown it. The historical drama is only one field open to our People's Theater. Let us open the way to others.

First among these is the social drama, with which a generation of vigorous dramatists have been so busily concerned. Following in the footsteps of Ibsen, Björnson, and Hauptmann, poets of the north, Jean Jullien, Descaves, Mirbeau, Ancey, Hervieu, Brieux, François de Curel, and Emile Fabre have given sufficient proof of the vitality of this type of drama, which is of all types the most needed

nowadays, for it is rooted in the suffering, the doubt, and the aspirations of the present generation. It goes hand-in-hand with actual deeds. There are those who criticize it for this very reason, claiming that it is no longer disinterested art. But I admire it because it is not, and I have furnished reasons for my preference. Happy is the age of quiet, when quiet works may be written! But when the age is a troubled one, and the nation is in the throes of struggle, it is the duty of art to struggle with it, inspiring and guiding it, protecting it, and combating prejudice. I have heard people complain of the violent excesses into which art will fall if it takes this road. This is not the fault of art, but of the wrongs which it will have exposed, which must be done away with. It is not the purpose of art to reconcile and pacify, but to intensify life, render it stronger, greater, and better. Art is the enemy of all the enemies of life. If love and peace are its aim, there are times none the less when hatred is in order. "Hatred is a good thing," once remarked a workingman of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine to a lecturer who had been bursting his lungs trying to prove that all hatred is bad. "Hatred is just, for it rallies the oppressed to give battle against the oppressor. When I see a man domineering over other men, my indignation is aroused, and I hate him. I hate him, and I feel that my hatred is right." He who does not hate evil cannot love good, and he who can look at injustice without attempting to rectify it is neither a true artist nor a true man. The

gentlest of the poets, Schiller, he who took the most serene view of his own art, did not hesitate to plunge into the fray, and set himself "the task of attacking vice, and wreaking vengeance upon the enemies of religion, morality, and the social order."[1] But in art it is not necessary to combat evil with evil, but with light. The evil that is seen face to face, the evil that is conscious of being seen, is more than half conquered. It is the function of the social drama to throw the imperious power of reason into the uncertain scales.

There are many other types of drama which up to the present have been seldom seen in our theaters. The rural drama, the poem of Earth, impregnated with the odor of the fields and overflowing with peasant humor and rich language, is a precious mine. It preserves what is poetic in the life of the small communities and records for posterity their vanishing individuality. Pouvillon, in certain of his pastoral tragedies; Pottecher in his comedies of the Vosges country; the Swiss René Morax in his vigorous and quietly sentimental plays of the Var district—these dramatists furnish us with splendid examples of this type of play. And finally come the greatest of these poets, Mistral, the Provençal Homer, whose language is as harmonious as his ancient soul.

We must likewise make use of the rich Celtic treasure lying hidden in our soil, and bring to life once more the forgotten legends and popular tales.

[1] Preface to *Die Räuber*, 1781.

Our plains and woods were once peopled: there is no part of our land without its collections of fabulous romances, its beautiful and quaintly humorous stories. The people of the large cities have long since broken with the past; they no longer belong to the great family; but the country people are for the most part far different. You will find among them the purest types of long ago, such as are sculptured on the portals of Gothic churches. Nor is the resemblance confined to externals: the races of today are morally close akin to those of past ages, more so than you would think. Who knows in how many of their souls there still exists the forest of the fairies, of the Sleeping Beauty, of Lancelot and Guinevere, of Tristan and Iseult; of Puss in Boots, of Tom Thumb and the Four Sons of Aymon; and the echo of Roland's horn? Let us revive the stories of the past. Who, be he old or young, does not take pleasure in hearing them? We still remember the stories of our youth and think regretfully of the time when we listened to them. But they are ever alive. We have been silently awaiting for eight centuries—ever since Marie de France—the return of the Blue Bird.

Legendary material in drama requires the aid of music. Music indeed has a most important part to play in poetic and rustic drama. *L'Arlésienne* is the finest example. We may say that music has not yet received the treatment in our drama which it deserves. The poets have dispensed with it, partly through sheer ignorance, and partly through fear

and jealousy. Music and poetry are two wings of the lyric drama. He who neglects either, can fly only with great difficulty.

And why relegate pantomime, which is pure action, to the circus? The spectacle of action is a powerful spring to action, good as well as evil; it is absurd to neglect it. The circus at Rome kept alive the pleasure derived from action—a pleasure we know little about nowadays, but one which is a fundamental need of all great nations. The Greeks cultivated bodily as well as mental exercise. Let us give the body its proper place in art. Our Theater must be a Theater of men, and not merely of writers.

How many are the new types of drama which might flourish in our People's Theater! But it would be a vain task to describe the shadows of the future.[1] Nothing counts but actual achieve-

[1] Just a word on another type of drama which is dead in the France of today: the *Improvised Comedy.* In the provinces, where the mind is quicker and the spirit wider awake, it is not necessary that the plays be written down in their entirety. It might even be well to allow the fancy a little free play, and let the people act at their ease round a given theme or story. This is what the Italians do in their *Commedia dell' arte,* which is still in existence among the peasants. To those who consider improvisation outside the province of art, let me quote not only Michelet—who declares that "it would be a pity to let the Southerners have complete texts, because a theme alone suffices"—but Goethe, who remarked of *Wallensteins Lager* that "this sort of play demands the introduction of something new at every performance, in order to hold the attention of the spectators." (Goethe to Schiller, Oct. 5, 1798.)

ment, and it is not yet time for us to enter a new continent. Each may start forth on his quest; he is sure to return laden with booty. Let us dare to raise art to the height of that tragedy which is now being acted in the world at large. The words of Schiller on the occasion of the first performance of *Wallensteins Lager* (October, 1798)[1] may well be our guide and inspiration:

"The new era which opens for us today will encourage the poet to leave the beaten path of yesterday, and transport you out of your everyday existence up to a higher, a nobler stage, not perhaps unworthy of this sublime hour when our efforts are all bent toward the future. Only a great subject is capable of stirring mankind to the depths. The mind, if fettered and cramped, degenerates, but man advances as his horizon widens. And now, at the end of this century, when reality itself becomes poetry, when we are witnesses of gigantic souls striving onward toward a great prize, when men fight for the highest interests of humanity, liberty, and power—now, I say, the art of the drama may evoke the shades of the past in order to take flight to more distant summits. It can do this, and it will unless it rests content to be an object of shame before the eyes of the whole world."

We must not complain of our destiny. Fate has given us plenty to do. Ours is a happy age, for we have great tasks to accomplish. Happy the man

[1] See the magnificent appeal of Mazzini *To the Poets of the 19th Century* (*Ai poeti del secolo XIX*, 1832).

who succumbs beneath the weight of so glorious a fatigue! This is far better than succumbing to the boredom of doing nothing at all, or sadly contemplating the work of others. Let us not say what the melancholy author of the *Caractères* [La Bruyère] was forced to say in his worn-out age: "Everything has been said, and we have come too late." Nothing has been said of our new society. Everything waits to be said. Everything waits to be done. To work!

THE END

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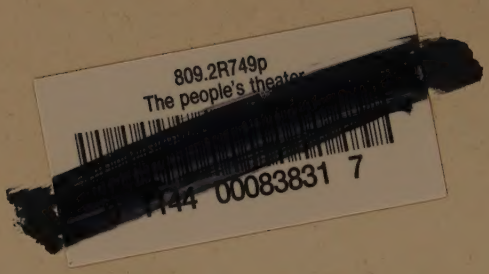
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